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The Maya World *of* Communicating Objects

Quadripartite Crosses, Trees, and Stones



MIGUEL ANGEL ASTOR-AGUILERA

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Miguel Angel Astor-Aguilera

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To Gary H. Gossen, Marilyn A. Masson, and Karl A. Taube.
Three hearthstone advisors who guided me, befriended me,
and taught me so much.

And to Monico Tuz Poot.
Yuum a'iin yóok'ol j'meeno'ob (Sun priest over priests),
in yuum (my father), *in jkaansaj* (my teacher),
yéetel hach uts in biskinba (and my good friend).

For the Maya there was no separation between secular and sacred dimensions of either the passage of time or the activities of humans engaged in everyday or specialized ritual activities . . . The arrival of European Christianity, a physical conquest and a cosmology dominated by sequential conceptions, required adaptations.

In terms of the new political economy of survival, and within the new ideological order, the Maya were forced to fit into new linear historical sequences.

In this sense the pilgrimage process, as manifested by newly acquired saints, shrines, and annual visits by individual devotees, reflects the traditions of Western civilization.

At the same time, however, the Maya retained their own cosmological concepts within which they incorporated the new terrestrial arrangements.

— HERMAN W. KONRAD,
"Pilgrimage as Cyclical Process: The Unending Pilgrimage
of the Holy Cross of the Quintana Roo Maya"

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PREFACE

THE SWEET, ACRID COPAL SMOKE BEGAN TO SUBSIDE, AND THE hours-long offering was now at an end. It was now time for us to eat the offering of food and drink. As the bowls of food were handed out I stared blankly at the porridge before me. I was contemplating what I had just witnessed seconds before being handed a *luuch*, gourd bowl, filled to the brim with a sloppy mixture of baked maize dough, roasted and ground pumpkin seeds, and turkey meat and broth. The native Maya priest who had just conducted the offering had taken the dressed green cross on his makeshift forest altar and simply tossed it aside. This Maya ritual expert, generally called a *j'meen*, one who does ritual, had done this as he began to prepare his departure. His work was complete, he was exhausted, and now it was time to take his leave. I was quite perplexed at what had just transpired. I continued to fixate on his apparent carelessness with the green cross. The j'meen had simply tossed the cross aside as if it were any ordinary object—as if the cross were not sacred to him. Yes, he was somewhat inebriated from his ritual drinking of alcohol. Yes, he was exhausted from the hours-long production performance over which he had just presided. Yet, his behavior seemed incomprehensible and highly sacrilegious to me.

How could this religious expert I was considering a holy man treat that sacred object with such apparent irreverence? Was he a novice who perhaps did not know his sacred and religious office very well? Not possible, as those present at the ritual held him in high esteem and respected his deep knowledge. I had many good reasons to be so confused about the j'meen's treatment of the green cross. I was born into the Mexican-Roman Catholic tradition and remember quite vividly attending the holy Roman Catholic mass with my parents, Jesus and Teresa, in both the United States and Mexico. My visits to the Roman Catholic church, however, were more often done in the company of my *abuelita* Rosa, my grandmother on my mother's side, in the northern Mexican village where I was born. While, as will be explained later, I do not consider my Maya consultants to be very Roman Catholic-Christian, I still could not easily come to terms with the apparent thoughtlessness of the j'meen toward the cross: a

problem that I would later find to be all mine and not his. While growing up I was taught, conditioned and inculcated more like it, that the idols, images if you will, in the Roman Catholic church as well as those priest-blessed objects in my home, relative's homes, and friends' houses were *sagrados*, that is, sacred. My friends and relatives, Mexican or American, who adhere, faithfully or not and consciously or not, to Roman Catholic traditions were taught likewise and hold this view in many respects.

The Christian notion of divinity and sacrality, as highly distinct from the mundane and profane, mostly taught me by my grandmother, were reinforced by my childhood observations of the Roman Catholic priest conducting the holy mass. During the service of Roman Catholic mass, one can readily observe the gentleness, care, and awe with which the holy priest, as well as his altar assistants, handles the sacred objects. The worship and care that the Roman Catholic priest extends to these sacred objects often goes as far as his lightly and tenderly kissing them. Any other treatment than that described above for the Roman Catholic priest toward his sacred paraphernalia would be suspect. Certainly, then, the simple tossing about, breakage, or discarding in the trash of any Roman Catholic sacrament, prescribed clothing, statue, image, or other sanctified altar paraphernalia would be considered sacrilegious not just by the priest but by the congregation.

Many of my ethnographic observations, regarding my Maya consultants' behavior toward their ritual objects, often contrast sharply with the Roman Catholic codified doctrine and protocol described above. I have witnessed Maya crosses, as well as other Maya ritual objects, be neglected, abandoned, mistreated, left as trash, broken, and burned. The behavior of my Maya consultants toward their ritual objects perplexed me until I came to terms with the fact that what I considered religious actions, herein read sacred, they did not necessarily categorize as such. I also had to come to uneasy terms with the fact that what I considered the opposite of sacredness, the profane, did not easily fit their concepts and categories, and therefore actions, either. I have begrudgingly come to the conclusion that the theological problems above are clearly mine, based on my ethnocentricity, and not theirs.

These realizations have not been easy for me to recognize, understand, or accept and have caused me great academic anguish. My social conditioning as a Roman Catholic Christian child and my Western anthropological training made me assume, without concrete evidence, that the Maya should also be hold native ritual objects sacred. I was dead wrong. My archaeological training, in

retrospect, done before ever conducting ethnography, and my studies of pre-Columbian Mesoamerican civilizations should have made my conclusion not so difficult to arrive at: Maya crosses, and their other non-Roman Catholic ritual objects, are practical tools to my consultants that defy our Western notions of what we reify as sacred. In my erudite quest, now as a religious studies scholar, for answers to the above confusion I have come to realize that I am not alone in realizing how problematic our interpretations of non-Western world views, past and present, can be.

Contemporary Maya ritual objects can be used, reused in differing contexts, enshrined, communicated with and or manipulated on positive or negative terms, disregarded once not needed, and terminated, that is, destroyed, if need be. Similar ritualistic behaviors are often visible in Mesoamerica's archaeological record. The equivalent in Roman Catholic behavior toward one of their sacred objects to that of my Maya consultants would be the deliberate defacing, breaking, or burning of an image, that is, conscious desacralization, representing the Virgin Mary, Christ, a saint, or crucifix. Archaeologically, ethnohistorically, and ethnographically, many Maya are known to have conducted ritual practices that we Mesoamericanists often term activation and termination. It is not my contention in this work that nothing or little has changed during the last three thousand years or so within Mesoamerican world views; however, change occurs within continuity. The material culture depicted and analyzed in this book is not going to simply drift away because it does not fit fashionable social scientific hypotheses emphasizing constant and sweeping social change.

Hardly anyone objects to the various Christianities, or other major world religions, retaining a conservative indexical core that anchors their philosophies. I view Maya cosmologies as not much different in being able to retain native core elements. The Mesoamerican peoples we call the Maya were and are part of a Native American world cosmological sphere where there are historical constants and variables, within continuities and changes, continually working back and forth between one another as they create transformed expressions. This work seeks to contribute a better recognition, and, I would hope, understanding, of indigenous Maya epistemologies. The time is long overdue for us to fully engage whether we wish to recognize Maya world views, how conservative Mayas tend to understand them, or whether we wish to continue fitting them within our own Cartesian-influenced mind-set: the two are not the same. The goal of this book is not an easy one since the Mayas are one of the, if not the, most studied peoples on earth. Shortly after I received my master of arts degree

and passed on to the doctoral study phase, a Mesoamericanist ethnohistorian justifiably asked me before my giving an invited paper, "So Miguel, so much has been written and is known about the Maya, is there *anything* new to be known?" Readers picking up this book may comprehensively ask themselves that very same question and with complete warrant. My answer to my now colleague was that despite so much being written on the Maya, and us having an apparent good handle on their socioeconomics and politics, and the ever-increasing reification of Maya religion, we still did not understand their cosmologies too well. Part of what I proceeded to describe to this colleague you now hold in your hands.

Orthography

The investigations leading to this work began in 1997 and have continued to this day. Several orthographic systems have been used in the transcription of Mayan, especially Blair's phonemic inventory.[1] I find these systems cryptic, cumbersome, and outdated. Interspersed throughout this work are translated Mayan words or phrases, and I note the following on the orthographic symbols used within: k = hard c, x = sh, ʼ = glottal stop, ‘ = low tone if over a vowel, ´ = high tone if over a vowel. The orthographic system used herein is not perfect and only partially satisfactory because of the complexity of the Mayan languages; I find, however, that following the contemporary Mayan alphabet as set forth by Bastarrachea, Yah Pech, and Briceño Chel simplifies the task: A, AA, ÁA, A,' A'A, B, CH, CH,' E, EE, ÉE, E,' E'E, I, II, ÍI, I,' I'I, J, K, K,' L, M, N, O, OO, ÓO, O,' O'O, P, P,' R, S, T, T,' TS, TS,' U, UU, ÚU, U,' U'U, W, X, Y.'

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THE FOLLOWING IS MY UNDERSTANDING OF TEMPORALLY AND spatially varied socially complex world view practices among the peoples we scientifically lump together as the Maya. This has not been a lone journey, and neither is it finished nor an easy one to try and comprehend. My professional career I owe in no small part to my mentors while an undergraduate and graduate student. My mentors, demonstrating themselves to be true scholars, never constrained my research questions and conclusions, even if they cut against their own views and published work. In alphabetical order they are Paul Gelles, Gary H. Gossen, John "Loch" Grant, Michael Kearney, Marilyn A. Masson, and Karl A. Taube. Regardless of my mentors' influence the analysis, theoretical inclinations, conclusions, and any errors contained herein, on which they might differ, are all mine to bear.

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Most important, I acknowledge my great debt to my Maya friends who for the most part remain anonymous. The one exception is my great j'meen mentor, Monico Tuz Poot, whose trust, guidance, and mentorship can never be repaid. *Ya'ab le tié Mayaobo'ob ts'u yetel u beytal in ajkánsajo'o, ti letiobe kin ts'ik u diosbotikí. Ts'ook leló, mix tun beytá in ts'ik u diosbotikí ti Monico Tuz Poot, men letie tu jea' ten tu lakal le bejobo' ka ts'ooke' ka tu ch'aen bey u palilené. Monicoe jach ajka'nsá ti ajkansajo'ob, j'meen ti j'meeno'ob, yetelé juntu xiib ti xiboob, letie' tu yanten mix u k'atik ti ten, ts'ooke' ka tu ts'aajteen bale ma tu tukultubai. Monicoe leti u jach nojoch winkilil le ts'iiba yetele' mix tun beytal le ts'iiba wa minan le jach nojoch tukul tia.'* May in this work forever live Monico Tuz Poot as I continue to try to better comprehend his peoples' world views, communicating objects, and ancestors.

Miguel Angel Astor-Aguilera
X-Kabil, Quintana Roo
and Tempe, Arizona



figure 1.1: Map of Mesoamerica.

CHAPTER 1

What Are Mesoamerican Religions?

[Religion] is perhaps the one subject that has been most disastrously handled . . . Mesoamerican archeology has absolutely no coherent and consistent theoretical framework by means of which ritual or religious data can be analyzed and interpreted.

—KENT V. FLANNERY,
"Interregional Religious Networks: Introduction"

Religions, politics, and worldviews of other cultures are difficult for historians and anthropologists to analyze . . . They move us away from the common ground of humanity in the areas of biological needs and into the realm of thought, cultural values, and philosophy. The latter respond to psychological and emotional needs which are still poorly understood for even our own Western culture.

—ARTHUR A. DEMAREST,
Ancient Maya: The Rise and Fall of a Rainforest Civilization

In Western culture there is an effort to separate and specialize in distinct aspects of a unitary reality . . . There is no way, in Western logic, of unifying all these things in a common understanding, as does the Indian. It is difficult to comprehend many characteristics of Mesoamerican civilization if one does not take into account one of its most profound dimensions: the conception of the natural world and the human being's place in the

cosmos . . . This does not mean an absence of practical considerations or an ignorance of benefits and advantages; rather, they are located in a different context.

—GUILLERMO BONFIL BATALLA,
México Profundo: Reclaiming a Civilization

The Theoretical Thrust of the Work

IN THIS INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER I PRESENT A HISTORICAL synthesis of the Maya peoples and their world view similarities to other Native American populations, especially those of Mesoamerica. I suggest that despite our great knowledge of Mesoamerican economies and politics, we still do not have a firm grasp on Mesoamerican world views. While studies of Maya religion are now legion, as they are of many Native American cosmologies, their large number, and the fact that they coincide in much, does not mean they are necessarily accurate. Ruz, Marcus, Flannery, and Hendon and Joyce, to name a few vocal scholars, have stated that many Mesoamerican studies of religion tend to be unclear in their theory and methods.[1] I have painfully and begrudgingly come to the same conclusion, and one of the goals of this book is to present a better comprehension of Mesoamerican cosmologies by emphasizing native epistemologies as much as possible. My idea is to make the Maya peoples, as well as other Native Americans, and their ancestors as human as possible. My task is not a simple one.

Though we who specialize in studying Native Americans often speak of their religion, I, along with a growing number of scholars, have come to the conclusion that Native Americans did not have religion per our Western understanding. Religion is not a thing, although we speak of it and reify it as if it were. Many scholars have inked many a paper arriving at what appears to be an extremely problematic, if not impossible, task of universally defining what exactly constitutes this *thing* we call religion.[2] Defining one particular religion is an especially arduous task without attempting cross-temporal and cross-spatial universal applications. While many researchers have been satisfied with their definition of religion, fitting it readily into their work, no universal definition has yet to be subjected to critical scrutiny and survive unscathed. Religion as a philosophical construct is intangible and therefore difficult to locate and grasp. Religion as an intellectual concept used to describe and mystify certain human material realities has a historical life, and cultural context from which it stems and is cast, that critical scholarship cannot continue to ignore.[3]

Religion is a European-derived category and appears rooted in the sixteenth-century Latin term of *religare*, to bind fast, and this readily comes to mind in Durkheim's ideas of binding piously and sacredly together as a collective church.[4] Apparently taking Hocart's insight regarding Western studies of Polynesia that "there is no religion in Fiji, only a system that in Europe has split up into religion and business," Sahlins noted that "In our own native folklore as well as academic social science, we constantly use such reified dichotomies to partition the anthropological subject."[5] Evans-Pritchard stated in a somewhat similar vein that "in describing and interpreting a primitive religion it should make no difference whether the writer is an agnostic or a Christian, Jew, Muslim, Hindu, or whatever he may be, but in fact it makes a great deal of difference."[6] Evans-Pritchard's remark reminds me of Radin's directness when he stated that few researchers "have ever attempted to obtain from a native any systematized account of their own theory. It has, in fact, been generally contended that they have none."[7]

Although ancient Mesoamericans had conventions about their place and origin within their world, which was exhibited in socio-ceremonial patterns, they appear to have lacked what in any accurate sense can be called sacraments, liturgy, and dogma canonized into what one could term codified religion founded on classifications based on binaries of the sacred and the profane. Mesoamerican cosmologies are more about a daily social way of life revolving around conceptions of self, personhood, and sense of place relating to what is both visible and invisible. Bourdieu understood the restrictions we place on our study of others, especially in the behavioral sciences, when we do not take into account the practice of those we interpret in the eyes of objectivism, not so as not to be unscientific, but in order to establish what he calls a "theory of scientific practice."[8] My point of view, as a holistically minded anthropologist, considers as paramount the world view conceptions, whether ancient, colonial, or contemporary, of the peoples in question in my attempts to understand, describe, and explain them. I consider it a mistake to apply, as Durkheim would readily do, a churchlike collectivity where religion appears as a group activity that functions for humans to distance themselves from their everyday profane world.[9]

The assigning of binary divisions in pre-Columbian American cosmologies ascribes for these peoples an ineffable realm that did not exist and in this conclusion I am not alone. Hallowell has noted a tendency toward nonbinary systems of classifications by Native Americans, and Graham, Kehoe, Knab, Konrad, McAnany, J. Furst, Monaghan, Morrison, Read, and Schaeffer and

Furst have also stated or implied this.[10] Other examples of Western religious categories not being wholly applicable to peoples we study are not exclusive to Native Americans: Hocart and Sahlins have admitted as much for Polynesia and Turner for Africa.[11] Many scholars, and I include myself here, rather than emphasizing native points of view have tended to unconsciously rely on their own religious background and perceptions. Perhaps most telling in this regard has been Eliade, who admitted his categories did not fit many of those people he was studying while simply concluding that he had no other option.[12] I do not agree that Eliade had no alternative. He chose to have no option because cultural and historical context would have quickly invalidated his universalizing schema of religious archetypes.

Societies should be studied within their specific historicities, as humans are not single-minded in their cultural logic.[13] Cultural philosophies are affected by both environment and specific sociohistorical evolution. Therefore, rather than relying on general and universalistic concepts of religion that homogenize, distort, and ultimately fail as tools for understanding,[14] we should allow that non-Western societies often have philosophical concepts we may consider scientifically illogical as well as very different world views from our own.[15] As I develop my suggestion for applying more indigenous epistemologies to our scholarship, I will thread in, and admittedly indulge in, pertinent quotations in order to get across that Native American studies has often been at a loss to explain why we have yet to get a firm grasp on these peoples' world views.[16] The main argument throughout this book is threefold. First, before European contact, Native Americans shared enough similarities in their cosmologies to constitute their being classified as what are typically called world religions. Second, their similarities fluctuated around core views centered on fertility and a sense of place as marked by geographic markers and celestial bodies. Third, only by applying indigenous Native American understandings can we hope to gain a better comprehension of their world views.

Who Are the Maya?

I initially use the term "Maya" in reference to the indigenous peoples, their cultures, and histories that are the main focus of this study. By contrast, I use the term "Mayan" in reference to these peoples' languages. The diverse peoples referred to as the Maya are monolithic neither in culture nor language and are composed of many different ethnicities.[17] These various populations have been

lumped historically as the Maya in terms of a defined archaeological distribution of similar material remains and shared linguistic roots.[18] The Maya homeland, in turn, is included as part of an even larger region composed of similar but varied cultures, which Kirchoff coined Mesoamerica, and which for the most part extends from northern central Mexico to northern Central America (fig. 1.1).[19] Mesoamerican peoples did not live in a regional bubble but interacted within an American world system based on trade, alliances, and conflict. The ideological influences within these world-system interactions can be readily seen in the core world view similarities, other differences notwithstanding, which extend from Native Americans in North to South America. These core similarities are visible not only in present-day conservative indigenous populations but can also be discerned in their ancestors' material cultural remains.

Some researchers have emphasized an almost systematic replacement of Mesoamerican indigenous cultural systems with colonial introductions, but much ethnographic evidence overwhelmingly proves a different history.[20] Other researchers reify our archaeological period constructions as if they were actual social boundary zones impermeable from one another. My position emphasizes native resiliency as based on cultural logic that is composed not of abstract intellectual thought but the day-to-day life of real people.[21] Hunt elaborated, applying a "structural armature" argument, on why people do not so easily jettison long-used symbolic structures in favor of alien colonial forms.[22] She argued for a historic-evolutionary mode in noting that while some codes and symbols may change their structural armature, core can remain. Culture is elastic, and the retention of core traits can remain high even when transformed. Humans, not cultures or time periods, are responsible for the retention or abandonment of societal traditions as individual agents, or groups of agents, tend to reach back into the past to sanction their activities. Actors hold on to ancient structural elements not because the past occurred but because humans tend to see the past as an important cultural component to their identity.[23]

The history of indigenous America reads as colorful a symbolic field of drama that human existence can offer. The story of Mesoamerica does not begin with the arrival of the Spaniards upon a land they claimed to have discovered. The history of the supposed New World did not arrive on European ships. The story for the Maya begins millennia before Mexico's largest peninsula was known as the Yucatán. The Yucatán Peninsula comprises the part of the northern Maya lowlands that is considered a defined cultural zone not only from the rest of Mesoamerica but from the southern Maya lowlands as well.[24] Maya civilization

is a defined cultural boundary, changing but reproducible, that includes diverse ethnic peoples, social and political structures, and geography that temporally and spatially share cultural traits. From here onward note that I will tend to use the term Maya to refer to the indigenous people of the Yucatán Peninsula and Mayan to these peoples' language.[25] The Yucatán Maya peoples are the only indigenous ethnic group that has consistently in modern times applied the term Maya to themselves, their culture, and their language.[26] When I, therefore, specifically identify other Maya ethnic groups, and their peoples and languages, I will refer to them as Cholan Maya, K'iché Maya, and so forth.

Mexico's indigenous population has been estimated at 8 to 10 million or approximately 12.5 percent of the nation. The Maya currently number an estimated 600,000;[27] however, census taking in Mexico is still very inefficient. The Maya population may be as high as 1 million, thus making them one of the single largest indigenous North American populations. Most of the indigenous of the Yucatán Peninsula speak Mayan with little dialectical differences over a large, continuous native territory, and they share the same basic cultural patterns: the Yucatek Maya are in many respects *the* Maya.[28] The populous contemporary Maya are descendants of conservative ancestors who lived a daily pattern of social adaptation,[29] and an estimated three quarters of them still speak Mayan as their primary language.[30] The retention of their Mayan language and transformed ancient Mesoamerican cosmologies is part of what apparently allowed the Maya to coalesce around a mutually identifiable social identity during the Social War of Yucatán and almost regain autonomy and control of their ancient lands.[31]

Mesoamerican Cosmologies

Pre-European-contact Native Americans understood their world within much different world views than do Western Europeans and Euro-Americans.[32] While the scientific notion of separating the natural from the supernatural applies in our modern Western world view, such a dichotomy, if applied to Native Americans, distorts indigenous American cosmologies. In my view the continued application of the natural and supernatural dichotomy to Native American world views has hindered our progress in attaining a more holistic comprehension of pre-Columbian, colonial, and contemporary Mesoamerican cosmologies. Most studies concerning archaic religions tend to center on reified Western dichotomies[33] such as natural and supernatural, sacred and profane, magic and religion, and life and death that are variably not present in non-Western peoples' world

views.[34] Much social theory concerning binary categories of human religiosity largely stems from Durkheim's problematic assumptions regarding the universality of elementary religious forms.[35] Durkheim did not clearly state the foundation for his universal categories and thus provided little direct evidence to back up his claims.[36] Ancient Maya rituals in effect were not likely conducted as if in a collective church. Since according to Paxton, most of the basic aspects of Maya cosmology and civilization "according to the European perspective would be considered secular."[37] The problem with Durkheim's elementary forms, however, has not stopped many researchers from applying his theory. For example, to varying degrees I have uncritically reified universalistic religious notions in my early research;[38] however, with my anthropological scholarship now being focused within religious studies, I seriously doubt whether universal categories can be applied to all the worlds' peoples past and present.

I have elsewhere mentioned that the archaeological study of religion has been slowly shifting toward emphasizing less Western loaded categories.[39] Much of this shift has likely been indirectly influenced by Hodder's work on stressing individual practice.[40] Less loaded terms, although still requiring case-by-case definition, such as "world view," "personhood," and "embodiment," seem better suited to grasp how life was understood by ancient, non-Cartesian-minded peoples such as, for example but not exclusive to, Neolithic Europeans, Egyptians, Andeans, and the Mayas.[41] Non-Western peoples experience life within world views that have complex cosmologies; however, our attempts to comprehend the actions of those we study, through assumed religious universal behaviors, while perhaps containing variable degrees of fact, inevitably fail to present much indigenous meaning.[42] Durkheim's sociological theory of religion can be usefully applied as an analytical tool when used with great caution;[43] however, many data indicate that Native Americans tend to not have world view ontologies that easily fit his elementary forms.

Our religion category is an unusually highly loaded Judeo-Christian-Muslim term that typically has no self-referential concept in other world views.[44] Despite many problems, however, the religion concept as founded on assumed universal binaries has been widely applied.[45] I credit Mircea Eliade with the most uncritical assumptions regarding universal binary categories of religion, in an especially highly idealized, mystical, and dramatized manner. This is because of his incredible fixation on what he called sacred space, sacred time, sacred symbols, sacred myths, *sacred this and sacred that*, whereupon, according to him, all human actions concentrate on seeking divine hierophantic manifestations.[46]

World views are not simple to arrange and box in despite a seductive draw to do so, especially through a universal decontextualized cherry-picking as Eliade was wont to do, apparently for his own personal mystical quest.[47] Eliade himself admitted that his "literary creations," that is, his novels, "contributed to a more profound understanding of certain religious structures."[48] Countering Eliade's creative speculation that "originally all art was 'sacred' . . . [representing] an encounter between man and the divine,"[49] there is no evidence for the type of point-blank claims in which he often engaged. Eliade had little actual critical regard for religious theory or history, despite his academic position, and I find it therefore pertinent, because of his continuing direct and indirect influence on Mesoamerican studies, to zero in on his repeated, often far too simplistic assertions.

Eliade's Transcultural Homogenizing in His Own Words

In order to discuss Maya cosmologies in some sort of introduction to this work, I need to recognize indigenous concepts as best as I presently understand them. This approach is not an easy one and requires that I try to minimize nonindigenous religious notions in my studies. Wheatley is a good example here of what I need to avoid; he says, "Before territory could be inhabited, it had to be sacralized—that is cosmicized. Its consecration signified its reality and therefore sanctioned its habitation: but its establishment as an imitation of a celestial archetype required its delimitation and orientation as a sacred territory within profane space."[50] Wheatley's notions of a "pivot" are very similar to Eliade's use of an "axis."[51] Contrary to what is often assumed, there are no supernatural portals within these world views corresponding to Eliade's axial "'doors of the gods' and hence places of passage between heaven and earth."[52] Admittedly, I have, without realizing where the terms came from and their sociotheoretical implications, applied both Wheatley's and Eliade's concepts in the past.[53] In my present work, however, I emphasize indigenous meaning behind the quad symbol rather than a foreign mystical one. Quadripartitioning in Mesoamerica tends to do with linking ritual production to notions of social space, agriculture, identity, and the well-being of the community in terms of wealth and health. I am not the first to recognize how often Eliade's mystical assumptions are insurmountably problematic, yet his work, albeit often unreferenced, often seems to influence Native American studies.[54] Part of this problem, to variable degrees, was Eliade's highly influential work on shamanism.[55]

Many studies of Mesoamerican religion are partly based on the assumption that past and present Mesoamerican ritual practices are centered on the assumed archaic religion of shamanism.[56] The term "shaman" is now widely and loosely applied as a Weberian sort of ideal type[57] transcultural, interpretive construct for indigenous priest-medicine men who were often derogatorily called witch doctor in days past.[58] The actual concept of shamanism seems to be found in the Asian regions from Siberia to Nepal.[59] The word shaman comes to us from the Tungus word *saman* and apparently stems from *samana* (*sramana*), the ancient Sanskrit-Pali word for Buddhist monk, and is related to the Chinese term of *sha-men* in also referring to a Buddhist monk.[60] In light of the above, the wholesale application of a shamanistic template to the indigenous Americas has not come without vocal opposition.[61] Shamanistic practice, according to Eliade, stresses the preeminent concept of a pivotlike cosmic portal through which the earth plane is linked to an upper and lower world by which the magician-psycho-pomp shaman communicates with supernatural beings with the aid of his trance-inducing drum and helper spirits he mounts and therefore controls.[62]

Shamans apparently master and control supernatural spirits through a cosmic pivot, this portal being coined by Eliade as an *axis mundi*, while in an altered state of ecstasy. This requirement poses great cultural problems in terms of universal applications. Within Eliade's delineation of the role and function of the psycho-pomp, that is the shaman, is the problem of finding actual shamanism in the indigenous Americas. Ridington and Ridington add further to the debate of what shamanistic practice entails by stating that

> shamanism is usually described as a magical flight into a supernatural realm. But what do we really mean when we speak of supernatural realms? Surely we do not still believe that savages imagine nonexistent worlds because of their poor understanding of physical reality. The real meaning of the supernatural must be symbolic and the shamanic flight an inner journey into a realm of experience for which the symbols stand. The three worlds of a shamanic cosmology are not geographical places but internal states of being represented by geometric analogy. The shaman does not really fly up or down, but inside to the meaning of things. Shamanism is a magical flight into a hidden, internal, experiential dimension in which time, space, and distance as we know them, as well as the distinction between subject and object, merge into unity. [63]

Critical analysis of shamanism requires that we consider a historical and ethnographic context for this phenomenon. Shirokogoroff is consistently clear that shamanic practice is characterized by ritual intercessors who can initiate and terminate their interaction, through a master and control, of spirits at will.[64] This mastery and control of spirits is achieved through the use of special paraphernalia and the healer's body as a voluntary vessel for the mounting and expulsion of said spirits. Shamans, furthermore, are required to place themselves as candidates for this role and be accepted as such by their respective communities. Explicit in the above is that shamans are masters over spirits and possess them rather than the spirits possessing them. Also explicit in the above is that shamans enter altered states of consciousness at will without the aid of mind-altering substances or physically induced stress. Note in the above that the spirits the shaman mounts and masters are *not* his or her spirit or animal counterparts.

Sidky, using Shirokogoroff's diagnostic data set, has arrived at a critically thorough definition of what shamanism is in order to differentiate this specific practice from healers found in very different societies and cultures:

> The Shaman is a socially recognized part-time ritual intercessor, a healer, problem solver, and interpreter of the world, whose calling is involuntary and involves a transformative initiatory crisis. His repertoire consists of dramatic public performances involving drumming, singing, and dancing in which he is the musicant. He has the ability to access ASC [altered states of consciousness] at will (without drugs) and enters into a distinctive mode of interaction with paranormal beings of various classes. The embodiment (adhesion) of spirits does not result in the replacement of the shaman's consciousness. He has master over spirit helpers and uses that power for the benefit of his clients. The shaman has distinctive specialized paraphernalia: the drum, costume, headdress, metal bells, and beads. Finally, he commands a body of specialized knowledge transmitted orally from teacher to pupil according to tradition.[65]

The superficial similarities between Native American world views and shamanistic practice, per Sidky's *historical/ethnographic shamanic complex* delineated above, seem to be their foci on individual and community healing and on communication with invisible beings; however, it is only within these narrow understandings that indigenous American ritual practitioners may be very loosely called shamans. Whether global indigenous practices represent

shamanism per its historical pan-Asian context is certainly questionable and does not appear to be the case. I do not accept as valid the argument that the modern sense of what a shaman is is very loose, its usage now being quite colloquial, and we should therefore just accept this fact. The application of the term shaman to indigenous American ritual practitioners, past or present, is not accurate archaeologically, ethnohistorically, or ethnographically.

Although I find it difficult to fathom how, Eliade seemed confident that he was interpreting native concepts on their own terms. He states, for example, that "when, in one or two generations, perhaps even earlier, we have historians of religions who are descended from Australian, African, or Melanesian tribal societies, I do not doubt that, among other things, they will reproach Western scholars for their indifference to the scale of values *indigenous* to these societies."[66] I cannot help but come to the conclusion, in light of this odd statement, that Eliade was convinced he could interpret what indigenous values and concepts were regardless of never meeting the peoples or speaking the language of those whose religion he purportedly understood. I do not doubt that part of what drove Eliade's universal concepts of shamanism, sacrality, and an ever-present search by humans for the divine was based on what *he* considered respect for other cultures; however, respect to me means actually trying to understand indigenous concepts in terms of their own native value system, not a universal one based on one's own beliefs. Consider the following in Eliade's own words:

> We might say that the archaic world knows nothing of "profane" activities: every act which has a definite meaning—hunting, fishing, agriculture, games, conflicts, sexuality in some way participates in the sacred. . . . Thus we may say that every responsible activity in pursuit of a definite end is, for the archaic world, a ritual. But since the majority of these activities have undergone a long process of desacralization and have, in modern societies, become profane, we have thought it proper to group them separately.[67]

So why do the sacred and profane binaries exist for the people Eliade wrote about? Because Eliade considered it proper, time and time again, to say that they do even if his subjects of study have no words or concepts for what he claims. As he says, "The polarity sacred-profane is often expressed as an opposition between *real* and *unreal* or pseudoral. Naturally, we must not expect to find the archaic languages in possession of this philosophical terminology, real-unreal, etc.;

but we find the thing."[68] The thing? Perhaps Eliade was more precise elsewhere in how he arrived at his universal claims in his profuse writings on the same theme; he says, "It is useless to add that the terms 'reality' and 'transcendence' do not exist in the vocabularies of archaic peoples. But for our purposes, it is not the vocabulary which matters, it is the demeanor."[69] The demeanor? How can Eliade base his claims on an assumed demeanor of peoples he never encountered? Regardless of the absence of sound evidence, for Eliade there existed for all peoples an extreme religious binary based on what he said was an "abyss that divides the two modalities of experience—sacred and profane."[70]

Eliade does on occasion admit how complicated matters really are when it comes to human belief and practice. According to him, "The sacred and the religious life are the opposite of the profane and the secular life. But as soon as you start to fix limits to the notion of the sacred you come upon difficulties—difficulties both theoretical and practical . . . almost everywhere the religious phenomena we see are complex."[71] Implicit in Eliade's rare reality check above is that for non-Western indigenous peoples, the opposite categories of reality and transcendence, religious and secular, and sacred and profane do not automatically and unequivocally exist as he constantly assumed. Carmack, in describing the Kiché Maya, says the most successful conversion efforts Roman Catholic priests made were those of the friars who realized the Indians made no distinction between meeting in chapels, classrooms, or the town hall and that cosmology permeated all Indian life and social organization.[72] Aspects of this holistic, nonbinary world view can be readily seen for other Maya groups as they make little dichotomous distinction in terms of function of locality. The emphasis on location and place has more to do with ritually quadripartitioning almost anything and everything, and this is what the colonial friars saw as religious ritual permeating all Maya social life.

In order to better understand Native American philosophies we must take seriously the growing scholarly discourse emphasizing indigenous epistemologies when considering respective world views. We need to emphasize how native concepts are conceptualized and cast within indigenous practice. Schaefer and Furst, for example, mention that the Wixárika-Huichols have no word for deity and the closest analogy, meaning our sandal straps, reflects their environment as that "which ties [them] to the earth."[73] Some of my Maya consultants similarly touch pebbles to their sandals while making offerings at stone pilings and crosses in reference to noncorporeal beings that tie them to the earth.[74] Many researchers admit, usually in passing before continuing and

proceeding to ignore their insight, that Judeo-Christian derived theological terms and Western scientific categories do not readily fit or have similar concepts in Native American thought.[75]

Some contemporary Native Americans now use Western theological terms to describe and politically and legally defend their lands and cultural practices.[76] This is done, however, using the French, English, Spanish, and Portuguese languages that inherently define the words they use during political disputes with nation-states.[77] As Basso noted for the Western Apache, however, his consultants do not deal with their surroundings in our sense at all, as he explains:

> The distinction made by Westerners between things "natural" and "supernatural" has no exact equivalent in the culture of the Western Apache . . . Although these entities [nonhuman persons] have access to supra-terrestrial regions denied to man, they often appear in his midst and regularly get involved in his affairs. At such times they may be addressed like human beings, and it is expected that in one way or another they will respond. They are thought to behave according to rules similar to those influencing the actions of men, and it is on this assumption that Apaches interact with them. In short, they are not conceptualized as belonging to an order of phenomena radically opposed to that which makes up the natural world. Nor are they considered to operate independently of the immediate surroundings in which man finds himself and his society. They are integral components of these surroundings, and they are approached and dealt with accordingly.[78]

My experience with my Maya consultants reveals a world view strikingly similar to what Basso described above for the Western Apache. A careful reading of most ethnographies on Native Americans reveals the same. Monaghan, for example, details a quite revealing explanation of Mixtec cosmology as told to him by his consultants:

> "You may not think the rocks are alive and feel things, or have a mind as we do, but it is true" . . . People make sounds, animals make other sounds, and rocks make still other sounds . . . If the division between spirit and matter is axiomatic in Judeo Christian thought, Nuyootecos begin in a different place . . . *Nu ñu'un* are closely tied to place . . . people usually distinguish *nu ñu'un* by the locale they occupy . . . [The] different *nu*

> *ñu'un* shows that the earth, for Nuyootcos, is a complex and varied cosmos. At first I had a little difficulty picturing how something as solid as the earth could be a place where so many different beings reside . . . Yet there are many things happening that we cannot see . . . The idea of "sitting" somewhere connotes, for Mixtec speakers, permanent residence and proper place. The *nu ñu'un* protects and administers the area under its control, called its "house," and does not leave it. Although the *nu ñu'un* "sit" in Earth, they generally wander about . . . and are able to move through soil and rock . . . There are many different types of *nu ñu'un* . . . The *nu ñu'un* found in one bend of the river is not the same as the one found further upstream, even though they may carry the same name . . . "They decided whether they want to work, and how hard." They can cause a bounteous corn crop to grow, or they may prevent crops from growing and cause famine . . . [They] may be influenced by sacrificial offerings . . . Much of what the *nu ñu'un* do parallels human activities . . . When people talk about the *nu ñu'un*, they often refer to them as "the respected, older people" . . . Even though people view the *nu ñu'un* as superior beings, they do not view them as different from people in the kinds of things they need or in the desires that motivate them . . . Just as some humans are good humored or generous while others are reckless, impulsive, or mean spirited, so too the *nu ñu'un* have different personalities, which affect the way they interact with people.[79]

To be religious throughout the dominant European cultural traditions is related to binary behaviors and demeanors associated with a holy respect, pious awe, and fear of the divine as derived from godhood and its associated spiritual and supernatural realm.[80] Native Americans have no recourse but to use our terms when speaking in our language to defend their causes, be they linked to land disputes or other matters concerning indigenous sovereignty. The natives' use of nonindigenous words and phrases is often employed in ideological rhetoric cast in such a way to cause political reactions that cannot be achieved through the use of non-Western terminology. The above is not a question of simple semantics, as terms and concepts have historical conceptions and cultural, contextual evolutions that affect our analyses, conclusions, and construction of academic knowledge.[81] Stanzione, for example, has explained that our ethnographic methods can be quite limiting when set steadfast upon a scientific problem-and-answer framework that ignores indigenous peoples'

daily lives.[82] His end approach and mine are strikingly different in result, however. Trying to comprehend Maya peoples through a Zen Buddhist lens, while heavily idealizing and romanticizing them, while trying to find oneself because one is disillusioned with being Western is not my idea of where Maya studies need to turn.

Religious terminology and its associated ideological rhetoric have very real consequences, and I try to be cognizant of that fact. In Native America some ideological shift is seen as indigenous peoples are compelled to resist religious threats by adapting frameworks that in the end tend to diminish their ancestors' holistic cosmological world views. A cultural historical anthropology looking into the archaeology of a history of religions within Mesoamerica readily reveals that colonial powers imposed the terms "divine," "deity," "god," "holy," and "sacred" over indigenous concepts for expeditious supposed conversion, only to have heavily indoctrinated indigenous children later take them up and spread their use. Friars and later colonial researchers initially glossed some native words through metonymy and metaphoric modifications referring to godly, while in actuality they pertained to a powerful earth as seen through daily living, fertility, and centrality as typically applied to ritually potent administrators, visible and invisible patrons, and sense of place.

Most authors of colonial dictionaries painstakingly tried to peg indigenous concepts into their own understanding of Western religion. Their entries regarding this subject have rather general meanings about subjects the Roman Catholic friars assumed did not pertain to secular matters as they strove to distinguish, categorize, and compare what they considered their true universal faith to the pagan Indian false religion. Our reconstructions of pre-European-contact Native American philosophies cannot continue to ignore the impact of the colonial lens and inherent Judeo-Christian assumptions. Much of European domination, besides relying on brutal force, also used language translation, rhetoric, and ideology as tools to aid spiritual conquest and conversion.[83] Using and defining Native American terms and concepts within indigenous epistemologies, rather than solely the colonial works of biased chroniclers, establishes that their concepts may be ontologically different but nevertheless just as important as ours. In-depth analyses readily indicate that our Western dichotomies tend to be nonexistent in pre-European-contact Native American cosmologies.[84] Indigenous Native American philosophies are more complex than our reordering and predisposing applications of binary categories suggest.[85]

Ritualization and the Production of Ritual

Indigenous Native American relational world views tend to be unitary and inclusive rather than binary and exclusive.[86] Native American philosophies tend to demonstrate a fluid, dynamic world composed of interrelatedness rather than a world composed of impermeable dimensions. A holistic manner of perceiving what we divide into the natural and supernatural appears to be almost inherent within these world views. Native American holism is based on an integrated sociality with their behavioral environment as interpreted through interactions with sentient personal beings both visible and invisible, as well as animate and inanimate, that live within it.[87] While Native American relational world views are variable and can be differentiated, at their core they tend to stress a social relational debt and merit nonmonetary-based limited reciprocity in the form of ritual offerings or gifting.[88] Ritual offerings, what we often casually term as sacrifice or penance, are typically exchanged during kinlike relations as based on social respect and the acknowledgement of variable knowledge, power, skills, and agency with other sentient personal beings.[89] Who people are, visible or invisible, and how much social power is attributed to their beings is much dependent on and exhibited within the context of social relational debt and merit-based ritual production.

The above should not be taken as a benign, idealized reciprocal mutuality, that is, a relationship between two beings that benefits both and harms neither. Social relational debt and merit-based reciprocity entail a constant giving and receiving of gifts because of reciprocal relationships presupposing conflict as well as harmony.[90] What we often regard as religious is often as much secular within Native American world views. Amply demonstrated throughout a variety of collected data on indigenous Americans is that the existential and normative tend to be emplaced in their day-to-day quotidian concerns. Reverence, respect, and veneration offered to the land and ancestors do not equal unidirectional causality. Because an object or a directed action is reflective of what we consider the non-ordinary does not mean it pertains to or is aimed at distinct, discrete, otherworld realms by indigenous Americans. Careful readings of most ethnographies on these peoples defy our Cartesian-derived dualistic characterizations.[91] Many studies of religion tend to focus their analysis on the pinpointing of those human behaviors we usually term as ritual. The term "ritual" has been noted to be variably ill defined and habitually used to circularly state that one is referring to religious behavior.[92]

The typical casting of the term ritual is problematic in terms of what

constitutes religion or religious, and scholarship demands that our concepts be critically defined. In the following chapters, I will often use the term ritual but will typically tag it to a sense of production. Monaghan critically delineates and defines ritual within Mixtec world views as linked to production, and I find that his usage also fits Maya understandings.[93] Seeing ritual behavior as a sort of production is based on indigenous Native American practice. If a concept is cast as, and only as, an analytical trope or tool, then this should be clear; scholarship, as Tweed noted, requires us to be "exegetically fussy," and "scholars who have been trained to participate in an academic conversation have a role-specific obligation to reflect on their work—and the constitutive terms of their discipline. They have a professional duty to be self-conscious in their use of central categories."[94] Scholarship demands that we not only reflect on our colleagues' studies but on our own past work as well. My goal is not oriented toward nihilistic deconstruction of Mesoamerican studies but quite the opposite. My aim is to revise what I learned in the abstract into what I have been taught by my Maya consultants, combine this with the best holistic Native American studies to date, and critically align them with practice-oriented social theories. Bell has espoused seeing ritual as the ritualization of productive acts in the following manner:

> Ritualization, the production of ritualized acts, can be described, in part, as that way of acting that sets itself off from other ways of acting by virtue of the way in which it does what it does. Even more circularly, it can be described as the strategic production of expedient schemes that structure an environment in such a way that the environment appears to be the source of the schemes and their values.[95]

Ritualization activities, then, are a process, rather than something fixed or static in meaning,[96] where social capital and prestige are garnered, legitimated, and expressed.[97] Ritual, in this sense, incorporates a notion of nonroutine solidarity production, situational to specific circumstances, that relates personal experiences through cultural activities, as manifest in individual agency, practice, and interpretation that seek to transform and generate specific outcomes.[98] The above conceptualization of ritual and ritualization, as a form of production, is more stringent and understandable in that said actions are strategized behaviors that seek specific outcomes. Ritual here requires the minimum presence of two persons, human or not, where at least one of them is engaged in trying to pledge and produce an outcome that is sometimes garnered with the willing or unwilling compliance of

another. The implications of the above definition for ritualization mean that we cannot simply *know* ritual when we see something or think to detect something as apparently linked to religious actions and *therefore* the supernatural.

Sharer points to a very important recognition, arguably extended from Morley and Brainerd, that took me a very long and painful time to recognize, process, understand, and accept.[99] I now marvel at how obvious Sharer's deduction really is. Even though Sharer is not regarded as a specialist in Maya religion, I consider his contribution, so highly critical to our further developing a sense of Maya indigenous understandings that I need to quote him at length:

> In our Western view, religion is a kind of ideology, one based on belief in the supernatural, the use of ritual to communicate with the supernatural, and an explanation of the world and the universe (cosmology) that includes the supernatural, all of which tends to reinforce human values and guide human behavior. But these categorical distinctions are not so clear-cut when we begin to consider the ideology of the ancient Maya. The Maya of today continue to maintain vestiges of an ancient ideology quite unlike our Western concepts of life and the universe. We conceive of our world as being composed of two discrete components, the natural realm and the supernatural realm. [To us] the natural world corresponds to that which is observable . . . [and] we reserve the unobservable realm to something we call the supernatural . . . The world of the ancient Maya, so different from our own, was governed by a cosmological order that transcended our distinction between the natural and supernatural realms.

To take full consideration of Sharer's previous statement, it follows that if the Maya did not have a supernatural and natural distinction then neither did they have a sacred and profane dichotomy. Despite Durkheim's claim to the contrary, these binaries are not unrelated, as they work in tandem, and you cannot have one set at the exclusion of the other.[100]

Iconosymbolic Reconstruction: An Iconology of Maya Cosmology

My methodology in studying religion, which I term iconosymbolic reconstruction, is founded upon an iconology comprised of indexical analysis concentrating on material culture, history, human agency, and indigenous epistemologies.

Iconology, being a historic interpretation of iconographic images, investigates iconic origin; traces their changes and continuities; and how their themes are interrelated, overlap, and are transformed. The function of imagery is often polysemic, multivocalic with often elusive meanings, suggesting something beyond the visible object. Iconology, the analysis of visual images as coherent historical documents[101] viewed across time and space, is somewhat distinct though derived from iconography in that its method is to analyze icons through a systematic but humanistic discipline.[102] Iconology is distinct from iconography in that it is more concerned with the portrayal of subject matter, concentrating on the historical and philosophical attitudes and persuasions of a people as condensed in their imagery.[103]

Iconology can be transdisciplinary by combining the social sciences and the humanities in seeking to historically uncover meaning in images that differ in their modes of representation.[104] Imagery is often not merely about illustration but about messaging and interpretation at given moments in time within particular cultures and settings. My iconology of Maya imagery seeks to create a synthesis from the temporal and spatial cultural context of particular artifacts. Within this iconology I define Maya culture as the framework of philosophies, indexes, and values in terms of which individuals within these societies have defined their world, expressed their feelings, and made judgments. I emphasize that historical subjects, known or unknown, are the force through which Maya society has been structured and transformed.

The colonial to contemporary Maya have often been viewed simply as a vestige culture left over from a grand past. I present a more holistic historical synthesis of the Maya by emphasizing social structure as a manner of exploring the ways in which they have interacted with established micro- and macrosociopolitical ideologies in Mesoamerica. Sociopolitical and cultural autonomy has never truly existed either in pre-Columbian epochs or in the postconquest era, and the socioeconomic interactions on a large scale in Mesoamerica are now being situated within a mini-world-system.[105] The mini-world-system of Mesoamerica was not only interactive in terms of trade but in cosmological ideas that went along with associated banter during barter and extension of friendship and alliance. Ethnographic documentation demonstrates, as an example of these shared cosmological ideas, that many Mesoamerican indigenous peoples have the concept of animal counterparts in addition to their physical selves.[106]

Maya elite interactions and their ideologies appear to have been a major concern of ancient scribal artists in their representing how their rulers had animal

counterparts that sometimes made themselves present during their ritual production. Ancient Maya scribes appear to have been quite knowledgeable and active in writing their myth-histories as depicted on polychrome vases.[107] We know that scenes and characters on ceramic vessels were probable analogs to those found in the K'ichéan Mayan *Popol Vuh*.[108] Some of the most interesting characters depicted in Maya imagery are the composite human-animal figures found on ceramic vessels.[109] A good understanding of these composites, originally thought to be gods or deities,[110] was not arrived at until Houston and Stuart, and independently Grube, deciphered the glyphic reading of *way* in association with what they termed "co-essences" or "animal spirit companions."[111] The concept of the coessence companion, which many researchers usually know by the Central Mexican Nahuatl language word *nagual*, is thought to have been prevalent from the time of the Olmecs to the present day.[112]

The greater Maya region was part of not only a larger world of economic ties but also a Mesoamerica trading sphere that shared a common although somewhat varying philosophical template. This template, composed of Mesoamerican cosmological structures crystallized as a fundamental core philosophy perhaps by the Terminal Preclassic, apparently remained without great disjuncture until the arrival of the Spaniards.[113] Maya studies have accelerated within the last few decades of this writing, and there has been an overwhelming conclusion that a cosmological underpinning permeated these peoples' social structures. Maya cosmology, as such, was inseparable from day-to-day activities, socioeconomic and political endeavors, and warfare.[114] The reconstruction of pre-Columbian Maya cosmology, however, remains highly illusive because indigenous contextual indexical concepts represented in their imagery and glyphic script that are still poorly understood.

The Reconstruction of Maya Cosmologies

Our knowledge concerning ancient Mayan writing has grown steadily to the point of nearly complete hieroglyphic decipherment,[115] and the ultimate goal of reading the glyphs and associated iconography should be a holistic understanding of Maya social processes.[116] Researchers' differential world views and mindsets condition how they will interpret, accept or reject data, and decide which of many meanings to prefer and apply over others in their decipherments of past scripts and ancient language translations.[117] Indigenous epistemologies, therefore, need be a crucial component of our understanding Maya world views,

as Mayan terms glossed into Judeo-Christian concepts are often not only inaccurate but also misleading. Elsewhere I have explained at length[118] that Barrera Vásquez's Spanish-Mayan dictionary translates sacred in Mayan as *kich*, *k'ul*, and *k'uyen*.[119] These are loose linguistic glosses given as last options and typically within Roman Catholic context, however. Mayan words often glossed as sacred variably mean something good, of good character, pleasant, and well-behaved in humility and personality. Other meanings associated with these words are given as to adore, venerate, or revere, however, such usage is noted as being for addressing a variety of Maya nobles such as, but not limited to, judges, administrators, and diplomats. K'uyen is used in referring to humans, objects, and processions and in root is associated with the movement of the sun as it shifts westward in its downward incline after passing zenith. The sun and zenith, and their cosmographic orientations, were and continue to be highly important to the greater Maya peoples, and these are often linked to their administrators.

Sacredness and the Living Ancestors

I have mentioned elsewhere[120] that although the Classic Maya used the term of k'ul, often glossed as sacred or holy, when addressing kings, they might have been referring not to an individual ruler but to the seat of office they held.[121] It is often the rulers' office that was highly respected, and this allowed the transfer of revered title from one ruler to the next.[122] Applying the above practice to the Classic Maya would make individual rulers privileged governors of their specific city-states,[123] and each city therefore organized around a particular lineage-based rule.[124] We can only speculate about how the Maya peoples perceived and regarded their rulers; much epigraphic information points to a historically unstable system of Maya rulership, however, whose claim to legitimacy was based on cosmologically charged ideological justifications.[125] Sense of place, herein the community, as Agnew noted, can be contextually linked to territory and emotion in terms of social power as it is exercised and structured within historically meaningful embedded places. Place and space can be creatively embedded within social relations in terms of political power.[126] This may explain why each Maya city-state ruler could claim cosmological right to rule and why revered royal lineages did not die out with the death of individual rulers. Elsewhere I mention that only skeptical populations would require the constant theater and blood ritual production as Maya kings were apparently wont to display.[127] Royal deaths were not always of natural causes, and people

do not tend to kill those they believe divine, godly, sacred, or holy unless there is skepticism regarding such claims, or those religious constructs are culturally absent. Being considered ritually potent, that is, imbued with social power, does not in and of itself equate sacrality per our theological conceptions.

For the ancient Maya, according to McAnany, "ideologically and physically, the boundary between the living and the ancestors was a permeable one."[128] Evidence that an individual's life did not end, per our Western understandings of physical death, is highly present in Maya burials,[129] on monumental imagery,[130] and in the K'iche Mayan *Popol Vuh*.[131] The ancient Maya separation between life and death was so unbounded that the previous was not easily delineated from the latter per our Western binary logic; as Meskell and Joyce state, "Death was no bar to the continuity of Classic Maya personhood."[132] There is a large number of Mesoamerican nonhumans interacting with humans, and it therefore follows, elaborating from Rice, that "among the Maya, the 'sacred' and the 'secular' are so deeply intertwined as to be inseparable."[133] Houston and Stuart calculate the primary issue concerning humans claiming divinity as derived in large part from a paradox researchers created as to what establishes godhood.[134] The larger question, however, is not one of assumed divinity but of reified universal notions of religion.

Missing in much archaeology of religion analysis is socioreligious theory derived from real life histories of rulers and influential religious figures within specific cultural and political contexts. By such comparisons I do not mean with other problematic theological constructions as has also been done with ancient Egypt.[135] I offer, by contrast, what is in fact historically known to be considered a sacred religious leader: the Roman Catholic pope. The pope has historically headed a theatrical city-state that governs a large clerical order in charge of large congregations of believers in a common faith. Roman Catholic popes are regarded through official church doctrine as the *vicarius principis apostolorum*, vicar of the chief of the apostles, or Vicarius Christi, that is, the vicar, lieutenant, and mouthpiece representative of Christ on earth. This hierarchical papal office evolved early on within Roman Catholic history into a sacred Christian priest-kingship and is directly linked to the Vaticanus state. The Vatican, from the Latin *vatic*, meaning prophetic and oracular, is the residential palace of each individual pope and is considered their seat of power. Pertinent to my analogy with Maya kings is that regardless of official church dogma, doctrine, and claim, the politico-religious papal office has historically been viewed with skepticism, often under threat, by some of the church's elite followers including priests, cardinals, and bishops.[136]

Maya rulers were far too visibly human, and this fact would not have been lost on their subjects, and especially on their surrounding circle, with whom they would frequently interact.[137] Maya world views need to be analyzed not in terms of idealized generalities but in accordance with documented human social practice as composed of hegemonies, counterhegemonies, and factional ideological differences regarding political claims.[138] I have elsewhere delineated that proclaiming to be kin of the sun, as interpreted to be stated by Maya rulers in their commissioned hieroglyphic inscriptions, and actually being worshipped as a divine deity are not the same.[139] Those of us who engage in Maya studies need to oppose the easy temptation to overmystify the politico-religious actions portrayed in Classic Maya imagery[140] by labeling every mountain, cave, spring, tree, city, glyphic text, monument, mural, ruler, and so forth as sacred or holy.

One of the major problems with a general assumption concerning ancient Maya religion is the presumption that every Maya responded to their objects, structures, cities, rulers, and spaces in the same cultural manner and for the same social reasons. A similar but multivocal cosmological structure, mixed with a variable percentage of nonadherents, would have led to unsteady and often short-lived rule—a tendency that is highly present in the hieroglyphic inscriptions, where noble right to rule was so perilous that rulers would in some cases end up as tortured, humiliated, and broken captives.[141] This is meant to culturally contextualize the fluidity that cosmology plays in ancient Maya world views, not to diminish or dismiss its importance.[142] Mayan inscriptions seem to imply that rulers, in linking themselves to historical ancestors and mythic nonhumans, sought to aggrandize themselves while seeking politico-religious legitimacy through the construction of monumental group architecture and their associated ritual productions.[143] My attempt in this first chapter, before proceeding to what follows, is to better integrate Maya cosmology with their ideology. In Mesoamerican studies, unfortunately, even extremely violent actions such as battles, war, and ritual executions often take on sensational religious overtones at the expense of pragmatic material and political motivations.[144]

Cosmology and ideology, despite their flowing into one another, are often conflated but are not one and the same. Cosmology is very similar to the worldview concept in that it is the philosophy of how a people see themselves in relation to their material and nonmaterial surroundings. By contrast, cosmovision when used here emphasizes how Mesoamerican cosmology was conceived as an interrelated whole in pertaining to space and time. Ideology, in turn, is the philosophical and political interrelations of a people, their societal institutions,

and their cultural values. Cosmology does not legitimize, justify, or question the existing order; it is the individual ideological interpretation of cosmology that serves this function. There are differences between a given social reality of a people and individual explanations or reactions to that socially given reality. Ideological distinction is not inherently based on a set of religious concepts; it is ideas in action that allow social differences, although perhaps based on religious ideals, as materialized by the political actions of individual agents.[145]

Because of the agency delineation above concerning the differences between what we term cosmology and ideology, there are certainly some problems with iconographic and iconological methods of interpretation;[146] much solid work demonstrates that in Mesoamerica, however, multivocalic symbols have prevalent, conservative set patterns that allow them to continue over time. Hunt demonstrated that Zinacantecan Maya core symbols are key to the space-time continuum between their contemporary culture and their broken past.[147] It is these iconographic patterned values, juxtaposed with cyclical views of time and historical glyphic texts that many pre-Columbian specialists are concerned with in their reconstructions of the Mesoamerican past. In the following two chapters I synthesize how iconography and epigraphy allow for a better understanding and reconstruction of ancient Maya and Mesoamerican cosmology as seen in quadripartite crosslike icon imagery. Let us explore, then, as I initially look at relevant material culture from the Preclassic to Classic Periods of Mesoamerica that exemplifies the extensive presence of quadripartite motifs in pre-Columbian Native American thought. I shall then show how an interdisciplinary reconstruction of Maya cosmology can be achieved through archaeology, ethnohistory, ethnography, linguistics, art history, and religious studies.

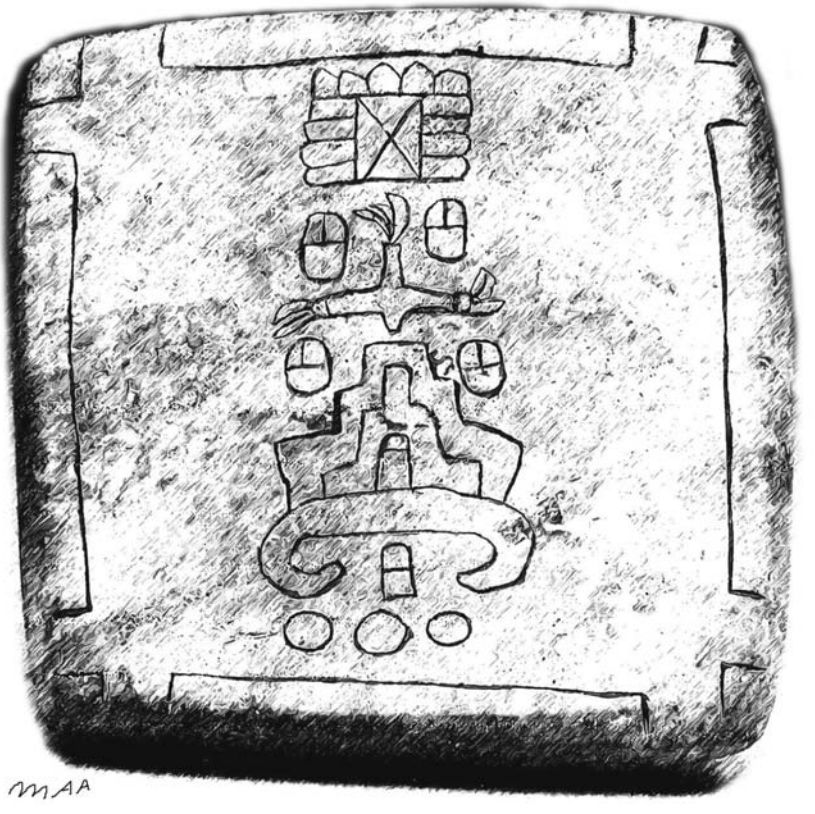


figure 2.1:
Ahuelican Tablet.

DRAWING GENERATED BY THE AUTHOR AFTER DALLAS MUSEUM OF ART.

CHAPTER 2

The Living Ancestors

Regeneration in Preclassic and Classic Mesoamerican Imagery

Even the least alert observation will verify the reciprocal adaptation of corn to humans and humans to corn in any peasant village of Mesoamerican ancestry.

—GUILLERMO BONFIL BATALLA,
México Profundo: Reclaiming a Civilization

The exquisite jewels, masks, and other powerful objects now in museums no doubt accompanied the bundled remains of the dead . . . They were not placed there to console the dead in the afterlife, but to sustain the soul so that it might find its way back to this world and rebirth—they were planted with the bones to insure their sprouting in future generations . . . When we think of the Olmec burying all that treasure, we should think of farmers preparing their fields, not miserly lords trying to take wealth with them into death.

—DAVID A. FREIDEL, "Preparing the Way"

I have been struggling for the past seven years or so to interrelate Maya ideology and cosmology with what we ethnocentrically call "the real world," the normal, pragmatic, temporal interactions and concerns of humans and

Western civilizations: politics, government, social organization, materiality, and so on.

—PRUDENCE M. RICE,
Maya Political Science: Time, Astronomy, and the Cosmos

Olmec Connections: The Middle Formative Ceremonial Complex

CRUCIAL ASSESSMENTS MADE DURING THE 1970S ACKNOWLedge that much ancient Mesoamerican cosmology stems from cultural traditions we label Olmec dating from approximately 1200 to 300 BC. Joralemon's now-classic Olmec iconographic study had major consequence for our understanding of the great similarities regarding much Mesoamerican imagery.[1] Some Olmec style icons, with quadripartite vegetation crosslike motifs (fig. 2.1), are ecologically influenced, and their presence throughout other Mesoamerican cultural traditions' imagery is quite widespread. Core Olmec cosmological concepts appear to have spread rapidly through nondirect trade routes because of the rise of sedentism and agricultural practices in Mesoamerica.[2]

Growing insight into Olmec cosmology gives further evidence to its influence on the rest of Mesoamerica. While communities within Formative Mesoamerica had cultural differences, they began to share a central commonality: they were increasingly relying on agricultural products for their daily subsistence. From the reliance on plants for food and other products emerged a web of ideas that coalesced into common indigenous philosophies regarding their world and these peoples' place within it. Olmec philosophical patterns and conventions did not emerge at once but evolved slowly, before the full onset of agriculture, as Mesoamericans became acutely aware of the cyclical life of plants that surrounded them. Early Mesoamericans had to have noticed the regenerative cycle concerning the life and death of plants as linked to sunshine and rain. If the weather was not stable during certain seasons the result was that specific plants would fail to grow and flourish, and these peoples were sure to take note of these highly important ecological facts.

Contemporary peoples in urban cities may not pay much attention to how weather affects the availability of produce unless, for example, the price of lettuce jumps. Modern agriculture is a risky business, and the reliance on systemic cultivation for subsistence during ancient times was a far bigger gamble without the technological advances in today's irrigation techniques. In Mesoamerica cosmologies, world views based on the surrounding ecology, landscape, and

weather patterns apparently began to emerge within the realization of crop uncertainty. Olmec people's world views seem to have been obsessively fixated on one reality of life: if plants failed to survive then so too would the animals and humans. Their abstractly simple, yet structurally complex, cosmology seems to have been based on the regenerative life of plants. The two major elements leading to the abundance and health of plants were obviously water and sunshine.

That plants require water, just like humans do, is not a hard fact to arrive at, as without it they begin to quite visibly shrivel and die. Sunshine, however, is another matter and more difficult to explain. Our understanding of photosynthesis is a modern scientific explanation, given our understanding of why plants are generally of variable green to purple hues, because of their chlorophyll-based cellular pigment and how this enables them to harness sunlight to then convert into energy.[3] Mesoamericans could not have understood photosynthesis on the scientific level that we do; they apparently did understand, though, that like themselves, plants needed sunlight to survive and that they thrived in its warming rays. In what scientists call phototropism, botanical life tends, as if quite animate, to seek light and grow toward where sunrays are most abundant, and Mesoamericans could not have been ignorant of this fact.[4]

It's the Weather, Stupid!

Today we have meteorologists who forecast, some would say predict, what the weather will be like later today, tomorrow, and a few days on. Will we need an umbrella? Should we wear a short-sleeve shirt, light sweater, or heavy jacket? Short pants or long pants? These are questions we ask daily and are usual topics of our light social conversations; they are not, however, typically life and death concerns of ours. If today's meteorologists with all their technologically advanced scientific instruments sometimes estimate the weather wrong, and they do, what chance could ancient peoples have at accurately predicting next week's forecast? More than likely these peoples were not worried with the day-to-day lightly fluctuating weather but more concerned with the entire season's weather pattern. If the worry is whether plants will survive so one's family will have food to eat, the concern will not be whether today will be overcast with a 60 percent chance of light sprinkles. A variance of a few degrees in either direction, or a little or more rain here and there, could not have been of major concern for ancient farmers, just like it is not for today's agriculturalists. If the trend

continues, though, with temperatures falling or rising and remaining too high or too low, or the pattern of too much or too little rain continues, then there are major problems of great concern.

Ancient Mesoamericans had weather problems and surely wondered how to cope with them. We can assume that having major weather concerns, these peoples would have likely turned to their leaders for answers, guidance, and assistance. Most specifically these peoples probably consulted those with great knowledge concerning their environment for explanations and reassurance to calm their anxieties. My point in the above is not an overarching materialist explanation; before one can think one has to eat, however. I eat, therefore I am, so to speak. Ancient Mesoamericans, including the Olmec, had to have been extremely anxious with each and every crop, wondering how it would fare up until harvest. Much Olmec and most Mesoamerican material culture, temporal and spatial difference notwithstanding, generally demonstrates a fixation with four things: the sun, rain, plants, and ancestral nonhuman beings. The fixation on these four things demonstrates wanting both to understand and influence agricultural sustainability. The material culture of the Olmec peoples demonstrates, without the need of too much iconographic interpretation, that some individuals within these traditions either desired to, or were of the opinion that they could, influence the world around them. Some of these individuals were apparently successful enough in their knowledge, skills, and leadership to have garnered increasing social influence over their growing communities.[5]

The remaining material culture we have of Olmec peoples' activities demonstrates that their leaders' ritual productions were related to concerns linked to agricultural bounty. The most successful leaders would have garnered great social capital as their success would be materially visible within the prosperity of their community. Successful leaders were apparently allowed to enjoy a better life-style, and this is often demonstrated in the archaeological record associated with elites. Growing insights into early Mesoamerican societies seem to indicate that as agricultural and economic prosperity increased, apparently so did the influence of these peoples' ideological framework.[6] Olmec imagery, on both monumental and portable objects, seems to indicate a reciprocal interpersonal relationship between these peoples and their behavioral living environment. The imagery on most of these objects, although Epi-Olmec writing is known to be present on some of them, is an elaborate, highly coherent set of signifiers, symbols if you will, that conveyed complex messages concerning

these peoples' view of their world.[7] The prosperity of the Olmec peoples, it seems, was increasingly linked to how to better understand and interact with their environment, that is, how to relate to their cosmos. The impact of that initial world relationality can be seen in the narrative performance texts visible in the remnant material culture that cuts across many generations throughout Mesoamerica.

Agriculture and the Cosmography of Forms: Earth, Sky, and Water

Imagery Olmec leaders commissioned displays many inferred broad patterns regarding their cosmology that were to later influence the rest of Mesoamerica. Key examples are the idea of cave openings being quadripartite-cruciform places linked to rain and fertility (fig. 2.2),[8] transformed individuals in trance-like states having quadripartitioned eyes (fig. 2.3) with cruciform-shaped corn

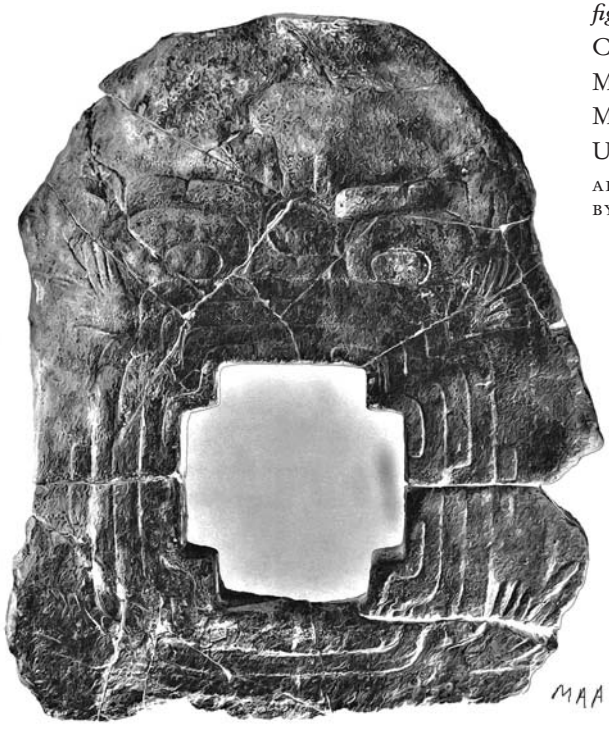


figure 2.2: Chalcatzingo Monument 9. Museum of Art at Utica, New York. ART GENERATED BY THE AUTHOR.



figure 2.3:
Jade Celt. Dallas Museum of Art.
ART GENERATED BY THE AUTHOR.



figure 2.4:
Jade Celt. Metropolitan Museum of Art.
ART GENERATED BY THE AUTHOR.

plants sometimes emerging from clefts in their heads (fig. 2.4),[9] and monumental mound pyramid building that signified mountains in their midst. It is an unfortunate fact that many pre-Columbian artifacts have been looted, or simply found throughout the Mexican countryside, and then sold to art dealers. Olmec-style pieces have not been immune to this practice, and this has been detrimental to our understanding the context of these artifacts and associated burial practices. We often suppose that artifacts found within burials were placed there for the deceased to use in an assumed afterlife, but this presumption is arrived at without much evidence. Freidel dares an opinion with which I indirectly concur and, in modified manner, anchor much of this work: that the Olmec buried their dead with objects not for their consolation in some afterlife, but in effect "were planted with the bones to insure their sprouting in future generations" through a sustaining of the deceased's soul or what I refer to as person.[10] Burial context artifacts, in effect, were power objects of sorts. As I suggest and will elaborate later, the power of these artifacts was personalized by them being owned through the ritual tethering of the deceased's person, that is, their noncorporeal being, onto either their bones or associated objects. McAnany has documented in what is now Belize, Central America, the presence of quadripartite motifs in Formative Period Maya burial vessels[11] that I believe sheds light on Freidel's above-mentioned opinion, and this is where I turn below.

The Ancient Maya and Their Living Ancestors

Practically any Mayanist, if not any Native Americanist, having worked on burial archaeology has to have noticed that many burials are quite puzzling, at least to us and the way we categorize, correlate, and analyze our data.[12] What we perceive to be hallowed ground is often anything but as ancient tomb reentry is common. Often, in the tomb reentry cases, we conclude a priori that desacralization or profanation has taken place. If indeed pre-Columbian Native Americans sought to profane burials by their reentry practices then one must come to the conclusion that desacralization of burials was extremely common. Pre-Columbian burials often show evidence of reentry in both elite and non-elite contexts. Burial reentries often indicate that the primary interments are sometimes indiscriminately moved, with complete skeletons, random bones, or both from other deceased people added or removed.[13] What to make of such assumed rampant disrespect and sacrilegious behavior on the part of Mesoamerican peoples? In

the United States, unless done by a professional archaeologist under the auspices of the state or a forensic investigator with court orders, such acts would be deemed criminal and prosecuted.

Burial reentry for some ancient Mesoamericans seemed to be not only condoned but also part of regular mortuary practice. Some of these peoples seem to have participated in burial reentry, in one form or another, regardless of social status. Although ancient burial practices may be thought long gone, many of my Maya consultants in the Yucatán continue them and complain when the state forbids them from exhuming their dead. This apparent behavior in the pre-Hispanic past has made interpreting ancient burials difficult since the relatively scarce human remains that have been found, from what must have been large city populations, do not add up. The scarcity of burials relative to population size, furthermore, applies to both elite and nonelites.[14] A core world view element of the ancient Maya, from the Formative to the Terminal Classic, appears to have been founded upon a cosmology similar for both nobles and commoners that centered on the veneration and propitiation of select ancestors.[15] Dying does not make one an ancestor: ancestors are selected and kept as if alive through the practice of reciprocal veneration and propitiation.

Propitiation and veneration do *not* equate deification and worship. Maya cosmology, like that of other conservative indigenous Americans, is *not* composed of exclusive religious activity one does at churches on specific days and hours. In preindustrial societies, religiosity is often central and internal to production, trade, and daily life.[16] Within these societies there is often a politico-religious kinship, blood related or not, that forms the bond between the families and the dominant and the dominated.[17] By kinship I am here referring to strong social-bonding armatures, as in affinal relations, between one person and another rather than purely consanguine.[18] Extended blood relatives for Mesoamericans could be secondary in importance, and strong relationships were often formed along armatures based on politico-religious kinship. These political, economic, and cosmological affined bonds could be extended mythohistorically and linked to foreigners' respective ancestors. Foreign non-blood-related beings could, as allied ancestors, be communicated with and petitioned through ceremonial action. These political ritual productions might preferably, because of implied efficacy, be conducted with respective power-laden foreign objects or bones associated with specific ancestors.

Maya Kings, Politico-Religious Kinship, and Communicating with the Ancestors

Mesoamerican archaeologists have documented that the Maya buried their dead in residential shrines, under house floors, and within pyramidal structures. Linking Maya mortuary practices to land- and resource-claim legitimization, McAnany has persuasively stated that they were much different from those of modern Euro-Americans.[19] The ancient Maya apparently liked to keep their ancestors close at hand by burying their remnants close to their social and living spaces and thereby continue a reciprocal relationship where they could readily ritually attend, feed, and communicate with them. Death in ancient Mesoamerica did not result in the extinguishing of life for the deceased but entailed a physical transformation where the dead continued living in what we consider a nonmaterial state. There was a propensity, as noted in various pre-Columbian altars, stelae, and monumental architecture, to reenter tombs in order to conduct activities related to manipulating or communicating with the dead.[20]

A great deal of Mesoamerican archaeological data indicates that Maya families, elite and non-elite, centered their ritual practices on the veneration of prominent ancestors. Particular ancestors, selected for unclear but perhaps variable practical reasons, were sometimes housed in miniature shrines within household plaza compounds;[21] many deceased seemed to remain ever present as they were often buried within or directly outside the home.[22] Classic Maya elite and non-elite world views and ritual were not that different, cutting along all sectors of society, except as visible in the scale of their material culture and its investment of varied wealth and labor.[23]

The rationale behind reciprocal relationships between the living and those select deceased is based on the concept that those decedent, while no longer being of the flesh, nevertheless remained as if material, yet invisible, volitional beings.[24] McAnany has linked the ancient Maya reciprocal action of veneration to a lineage's access to land resources that become a home genealogy of place where ancestors' rights or claims are passed on to their descendants.[25] Home *here* is linked to ancestors granted certain socially acknowledged activities or responsibilities encompassed in ritual, political, economic, or cultural ties within the community or extended-family compounds.[26] Where one buried one's dead, or what one did with their remains, was not incidental but directly linked to affirming and retaining an establishment of place or home that was in effect the central sense of place based on ancestral kinship.

According to McAnany, ancient social organization amongst ancient Maya peoples was centered on activities related to their ancestors, agricultural land, and material goods.[27] Some of the goods that are present as artifacts at the site of K'axob, for example, are of particular interest to this work. At the Formative Period site of K'axob were found seven vessels interred within the burials and adjacent to, if not on, the remains of five elites, which had the quadripartite icon prominently displayed.[28] Why place these vessels with a quadripartite motif, some like crossed-bands with a middle circle (fig. 2.5) and others with a Latin-style cross (fig. 2.6), within these elite burials? The reasons are apparently similar



figure 2.5:
K'axob Crossed-Bands Vessel.
COURTESY OF PATRICIA MCANANY.



figure 2.6:
K'axob Quadripartite Vessel.
COURTESY OF PATRICIA MCANANY.

to those that guided the Olmec to depict the quad icon on what I previously called power objects: to figure their world view, as impressed onto their material culture, within their day-to-day activities.

Arriving at the socially constructed figured worlds of ancient individuals and their respective actions is not a simple task and requires a multidisciplinary methodology.[29] Within these relational in nature ritual actions are constitutive behaviors that are generative in performance, that is, they are enacted to create specific circumstances and outcomes. Maya ritual productions follow conventions set in patterned creativity within generative behaviors that allow for personal expression; these, in turn, demonstrate elasticity when confronted with innovations, drastic or slight, and thus allow for flexibility and retention through variable actions that pivot around core indexes or themes. The foci of these behaviors, relations, and skills tend to inherently revolve around the social framework and material culture that surround these peoples. The cultural remnants that archaeologists deal with are the artifacts through which the figured world, as manifest in production, display, and action, was made material. Although their indigenous meaning is now difficult to arrive at, these objects embodied variable social capital and power that depended on context and circumstance.

Ritual objects and the imagery mentioned for the Olmec and the Maya were personally powerful. Those having the knowledge could evoke the power associated with the above items. These objects display widely understood imagery that more than likely evoked a sense of place, being, and relation to other persons or things. These items evoked within a Mesoamerican cultural logic both the material, which could be physically seen and touched, and the nonmaterial, such as ancestors and their history and legacy that could be abstract and invisible yet very real.[30] These objects and their associated imagery moved within past and current events, and this in part gave them their power as related to the present and future.[31] That the Olmec and Maya peoples, and, as we shall see, most of the indigenous Americas, were choosing quadripartite imagery as a prime icon to demonstrate power through a sense of being and place in both life and death is no coincidence.

Other Formative Mesoamerican peoples also depicted the quad icon prominently in their material culture in a manner remarkably almost identical to the Olmec and Maya. Chupícuaro, Guanajuato, for example, has many artifacts depicting the cross icon, and some of these prominently display open mouths and other facial features along with the quadripartite imagery (figs. 2.7, 2.8,

and 2.9). So why are there quadripartite cross motifs, including some with mouths as if speaking, on burial context vessels? Ancestor veneration is ideological in nature and linked to subsistence, be it corn, cacao, other edibles, medicinal plants, and the constantly regenerating ecological environment.[32] The practice of reciprocating with ancestors has a side of respect, but it mostly appears to be practical in nature: the living need the support of the ancestors and vice versa. Reciprocation requires the regular maintenance of a relationship and thus an open line of communication. The mouths on these vessels simply depict what is understood in the abundant communicating objects of Mesoamerican cosmology: humans can talk to and maintain relationships with persons who are nonhuman. The quadripartite-cross motif is grounded in Formative Period expressions of solar cycles, agrarian practices, and ancestor veneration as initially formulated not by elites but by the masses toiling in the fields.[33] Aggrandized elite ideological frameworks, then, take their cue from rural cosmologies based on agrarian activities that leave no easily recognizable material remains for us to recover.

Elite ideology, composed of ideas put into political action, was based on agricultural production rituals that leaders slowly co-opted and transformed for legitimization purposes.[34] Cosmological concepts may be long present before imagery depicting these ideas become visible in the material record. Elite agency can share or co-opt these same concepts.[35] Late Formative Maya elites



figure 2.7: Chipícuaro Quad-Cross Communicating Vessel. Museo Nacional de Antropología, México. PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR.



figure 2.8: Chipícuaro Quad-Cross Communicating Vessel. Museo Nacional de Antropología, México.
PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR.



figure 2.9: Chipícuaro Quad-Cross Communicating Cup. Museo Nacional de Antropología, México.
PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR.

apparently began to institutionalize the rural-based practice of ancestor veneration as linked to agriculture in order to legitimize the extraction of tribute as sanctioned by the ritual maintenance of a socially defined rulership based on lineage.[36] The rural practice of reciprocating with ever-present ancestors, then, was aggrandized in order to serve elite demands.[37] The core symbol of a quadripartite sense of space appears to have been present within this Formative rural

cosmology. As will be explained later the quad-cross motif is a polysemic icon that represents the sun, rain, ancestors, and the community. Elites throughout the indigenous Americas appear to have explicitly tapped into the quadripartite icon to represent their leadership, as linked to the sun, rain, and agriculture, thereby linking themselves to ancestors who could provide for the continued well-being of their communities. It therefore seems that each of these communities could claim to be at the center of the sun's path and thus at the center of its members' perceptible world.

The Community as an Ancestral Umbilical Center

Late Formative to Early Classic West Mexican shaft tombs contain artifacts that appear to link the quad motif with their communities, rulers, and ancestors. Mesoamerica, western Mexico, northwestern Mexico, and the American Southwest share many cultural traits that are visible in the archaeological record from approximately 1200 to 600 BC.[38] Considering the above, we should not be surprised to find ceramics with the quadripartite motif in north to west Mexican areas or in the greater Southwest. In western Mexico, for example, several shaft tombs conspicuously have vessels with the quad motifs placed directly adjacent to skeletal remains (fig. 2.10). The quadripartitioning icon, however, is not always in the shape of the Latin-type cross. Beekman has suggested, for example, that plaza pole rituals in Late Formative to Classic Period central Jalisco in western Mexico were related to center and quad directionality.[39] He specifically links "circular bowl-shaped depressions" with pole raising, a theme regarding ceramic bowls that I will come to shortly, whereby men who look remarkably like birds perched atop trees balance themselves atop poles with quad-cross motifs on what I believe to be a sunburst design, rooflike top (fig. 2.11).[40] Similar western Mexican imagery is depicted as a central nub surrounded at its corners by four shorter nubs.[41] The practice to depict quadripartite motifs on rulers' scepters, or within scenes involving scepters or batons, or on elite clothes seems to have been common in the indigenous Americas.

Some of the most widely known scenes involving rulers, ancestors, quad motifs, and scepters are from the Cross Group temples at the site of Palenque, Chiapas. From these images, especially the Tablet of the Cross (fig. 2.12) and the Tablet of the Foliated Cross (fig. 2.13), it is apparent that ancestors were evoked to actively partake in assumed real time during ceremonies involving their physically living heirs. At Copán's Altar Q, in a further example, we have ruler Yax



figure 2.10: West Mexican Burial with Quad Motif Vessel. Museo Nacional de Antropología, México.
PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR.

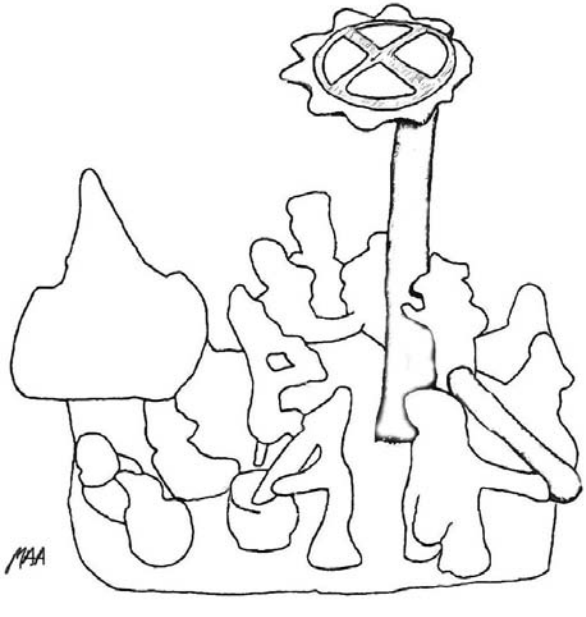


figure 2.11: West Mexican Quad-Cross Sunburst Pole.
ART GENERATED BY THE AUTHOR AFTER VON WINNING AND HAMMER (1972:FIG. 50).

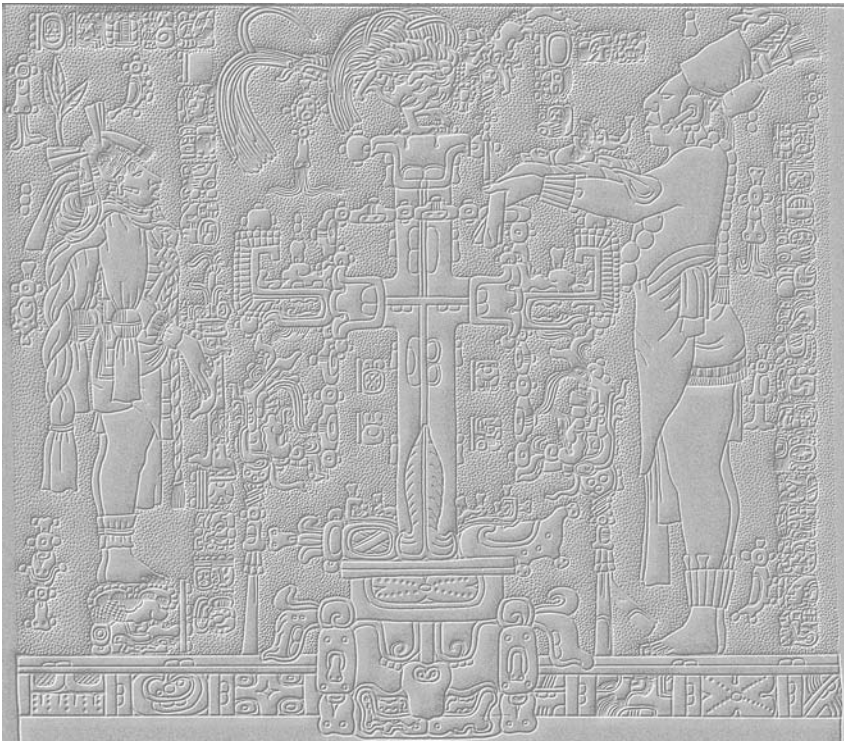


figure 2.12: Palenque's Tablet of the Cross.
COURTESY OF FAMSI.

Pac sitting and facing his ancestor Yax-Kuk-Mo' while in apparent conversation; other dead kings also seem quite lively and engaged in the scene. Also at Tikal we have Altar 5 that depicts four long bones and a skull of an exhumed female who is apparently a live witness to a specific event between two males who surround her remains.[42] These acts appear to portray practical relational events that demonstrate reciprocal behavior between those living in the flesh and those living in other than human forms. The Mayan hieroglyphic inscriptions leave no doubt that Maya kings ideologically sought to link themselves to mythic history, communing with ancestors, and agricultural bounty self-aggrandizement for the sake of politico-religious legitimacy. Ideology is so important in Mesoamerican world views that Rice, in coming to terms with the fact that our Western secular understandings force the Maya into foreign political templates, has called for more indigenous models in analyzing Maya societal organization so that our

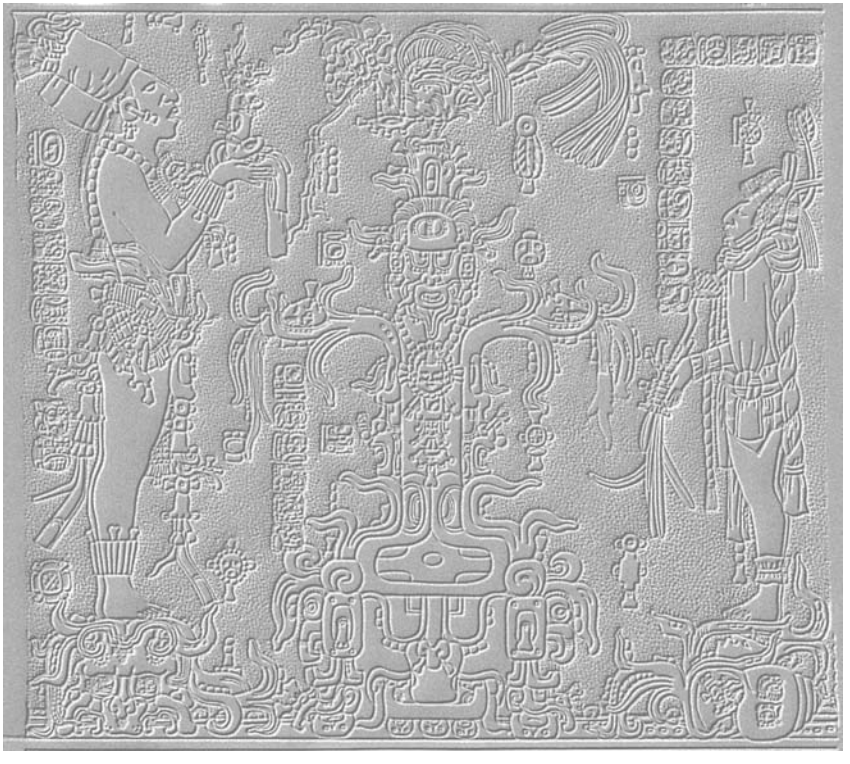


figure 2.13: Palenque's Tablet of the Foliated Cross.
COURTESY OF FAMSI.

understanding of Maya concepts can be more accurate.[43] Cosmology for the Maya remained closely linked to their ideology, economics, politics, and legitimacy to rule in a socially holistic Mesoamerican view.

Quadripartite Trees and Rulers

A Maya concept that links the ideological right to govern through a cosmological template is the indexical likening of Maya kings to quadripartite-like tree of stone. Stelae stone monoliths often depict rulers as cruciform trees,[44] for example, 18-Rabbit's serial stelae and Stela 11 from Copán[45] as well as Stela 1 from Yaxchilán.[46] Time-period commemoration of pre-Columbian stelae is demonstrated by the glyphic accounts regarding their dedication as written on these very monoliths.[47] Date glyphs found on pre-Columbian stelae associate their erection during *tun*

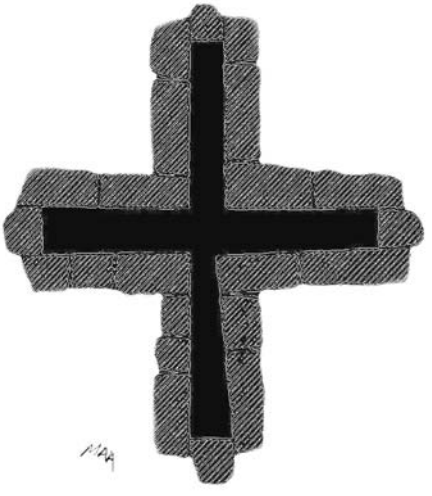


figure 2.14:
Copán Quad-Cross Stelae Foundation.
ART GENERATED BY THE AUTHOR.

and *k'atun* cycle ending periods. Stelae were the foci of ritual, commemoration, and dedication production,[48] and this practice has been traced to at least the Late Formative Period site of Cuello in Belize.[49] Further corroborating the association between quads and stone monoliths is the cruciform symbol found underneath erected stelae at the site of Copán where the foundation of stelae is literally cross shaped (fig. 2.14).[50]

The above associations link stelae, rulers, and quad icons to practices seeking legitimization by communicating with the ancestors.[51] At Copán, stelae rituals were synonymous with the political and religious heart of this city, and the ancient Maya apparently regarded these monoliths as both participatory beings and power objects.[52] Should not the custom of housing these communicating monoliths be present among the ancient Maya if stelae were indeed considered personal beings in their own right? The Classic Period site of Xunantunich, in Belize, in fact, has two such structures holding a stela within their inner chamber (fig. 2.15). The practice of placing stelae within recessed niches, furthermore, has also been documented at Copán.[53] Stela I was preserved in its original niched position, for example, by successive Copanec rulers.[54] Stuart states, additionally, that the practice of enclosing stelae may be "a sort of architectonic 'bundling' or 'binding.'"[55]

The placing of stelae in niches and vaults seems connected to practices related to ancestor veneration and communication. These monoliths in relation to quadripartitioning practices were probably seen as long-lasting, lineage–based, ancestor stone bundles of sorts. Newsome mentions, for example, that Maya elites would receive communications from nonhuman guides, assistants, and ancestors who were supplicated during journeys undertaken while dreaming.[56] The primary marker for the Classic institutionalization of the stelae complex was its use for recording royal history, the grand display of rulers, and the marking of cycle endings;[57] these monoliths, then, were part of a tradition that represented ancestral and physically living rulers as cruciform stone trees.[58] The



figure 2.15: Inner-Chamber Xunantunich Stela.
PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR.

Maya, in effect, marked the passing of years by the practice of *chumtun*, stone seating, in relation to ruler-linked events.[59] Stuart refers to the above process, per the glyphic accounts on some stelae, as the planting of *lakamtun*, big botanical-like stones, that were *k'altun*, bound in cloth, at the close of a k'atun twenty-year interval.[60]

Pre-Columbian stelae are known through glyphic evidence to have been dedicated during yearly tun and twenty-year k'atun endings.[61] Date glyphs on these stelae associate their *ts'apah*, erection or planting, during cycle ending periods. This has led to the conclusion that stelae were part of commemoration, dedication, and ritual productions.[62] Monolith erection has been traced to at least the Late Formative site of Cuello, Belize.[63] This practice probably extends further back in time, although centered on perishable wood material. Stelae, and associated quadripartitioning celebrations, are also connected to Maya ecology through trees and other plants that take a central role in Maya cosmology.[64] Stelae, as such, were most likely created to make a long-lasting statement to Maya human and nonhuman persons alike.

Some of the most striking ancient images linking the erection of stelae trees to the quadripartite motif are the apparent erection of quad-trees within bowls.



figure 2.16: Tepeu Vase Cross-Tree.
ART GENERATED BY THE AUTHOR AFTER COE (1989:176).

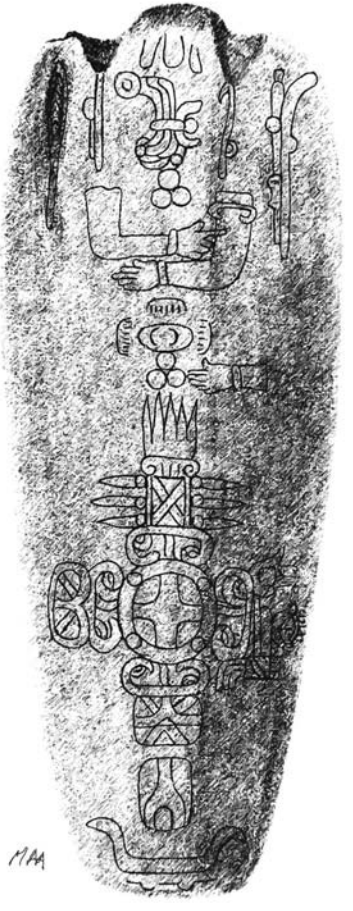


Buenavista del Cayo Vase Sherd 2

figure 2.17: Buenavista Vase Cross-Tree.
ART GENERATED BY THE AUTHOR AFTER HOUSTON, STUART, AND TAUBE (1992:507).

Several ceramic vases, one being the Tepeu (fig. 2.16) and the other the Buenavista (fig. 2.17), depict what appear to be respectively a ruler-priest and the ancestral priest Itzamná raising quadripartite-cross trees from within bowls. Headrick has linked the quad motif and its erection as a tree within bowls to evocational practices and the centralization of power at the site of K'axob, Belize, and this requires me to address her highly persuasive hypothesis in depth.[65] Headrick states, citing Reilly's arguments concerning the Humboldt Celt, that the cross motif and four encircling dots depicted on this jadeite piece represent the center of the universe and the "cardinal" directions.[66]

Headrick elaborates, in what becomes crucial to one of my points in this book, by pointing to the U-shaped "bisected bowl in profile" at the bottom of the Humboldt Celt (fig. 2.18). Within this imagery she convincingly pairs the quad motif as if it were a multidimensional image of what is within and emerging from the bowl. In an actual two-dimensional image, painted on a bowl, the symbols displayed above the bisected bowl on the Humboldt Celt would be inside, underneath, or on the outside of the ceramic in question. Headrick points out that above the cross motif on the Humboldt Celt is another sort of cross whose bands cross diagonally and that represents the sky or ecliptic. She notes that both cross types overlap in significance since they both conceptually point to a relationship between earth and sky. I agree, as she states it is extremely difficult if not impossible to discern whether a set of crossed-bands on a bowl is actually a quad motif with right angles. More than likely, these similar, yet still different, indexical icons were understood and



AA Humboldt Celt

figure 2.18:
Humboldt Celt.
ART GENERATED BY THE AUTHOR.

meant to be complementary, depending on context. Headrick states that quad-trees emerging from bowls come in assorted representations per the example of the three-bar cross depicted on Izapa Stela 25 (fig. 2.19).[67]

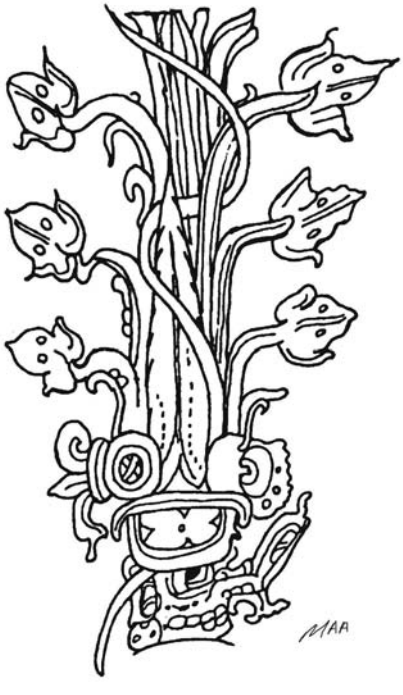
Headrick additionally points to the quad motif on Palenque's Tablet of the Cross, where the cross icon also emerges from a bisected bowl that has crossed-bands (fig. 2.12).[68] This bisected bowl, sitting on a skeletal head, is in context with a sky band that has glyphs of both the crossed-bands, signifying the ecliptic, and the right-angle bands, the so-named *kan* cross, that signifies the sun. The Foliated Cross panel has very similar imagery as emerging from a bowl with the quad-cross motif in another bisected bowl (fig. 2.13). Coincidence? I think not. Quad motifs, shown as trees and plants such as maize, depicted within or outside of bowls as well as in other contexts and objects were quite common in Mesoamerica. During the Postclassic, variable types of trees were shown as emerging from quad-motif bowls, as in this example next to the ancestral priest Itzamná (fig. 2.20). Other



figure 2.19:
Izapa Stela 25.
ART GENERATED BY THE AUTHOR.



figure 2.20: Caiman Tree Rising from Quad Motif Vessel.
ART GENERATED BY THE AUTHOR AFTER TAUBE (1992:32, FIG. 12H) FROM ROBICSEK AND HALES (1981:VESSEL 108).



Postclassic examples depict vinelike plants, some floriated as miniature cross-banded bowls, emerging from these types of ceramics (fig. 2.21). Stelae, as mentioned previously, were indexical trees and plants that were considered to be planted and thus have roots. Stelae, then, are quite similar to the trees and plants shown as emerging from bowls in association with Itzamná. Structure 2 at Kobá, Quintana Roo, had a Late Postclassic mural of the ancestral priest Itzamná in context with a centrally placed reused stela.[69] It is to the Postclassic Period I turn next.

figure 2.21: Vine-Tree with Stingray Spine Rising from Quad-Flower Vessel.
ART GENERATED BY THE AUTHOR.



figure 3.1:
Postclassic Maya Diving Figure with Quad-Crosses.
Museo Nacional de Antropología, México.
PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR.

CHAPTER 3

Postclassic and Colonial Mesoamerican World Views and Mayan Communicating Objects

It may be that people cleave to ancestral ways through general inertia, but it is more likely that there are good and sufficient reasons behind such persistence, much as there are good and sufficient reasons for change. Of these reasons people may or may not be conscious; but then it is the task of the anthropologist to inquire into what the causes for persistence may be.

—ERIC R. WOLF,
Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century

The difficulty in explaining what integrates people into this kind of structure, in Maya society or elsewhere, often comes from applying a supposedly objective—that is, our own—definition of need and advantage. The answer must surely lie in how the people themselves view these criteria, and this ultimately depends on how they perceive the world around them and the best way to survive in it.

—NANCY M. FARRISS,
Maya Society Under Colonial Rule:
The Collective Enterprise of Survival

Spanish accounts were strongly partisan, so driven to subjectivity by their format and purpose, that they virtually count as secondary. Conversely, the

published histories are so overwhelmingly Hispanocentric, so incestuous in their use of each other and of the Spanish sources, that they can be taken as primary—that is, primary sources on the European perspective.

—MATTHEW RESTALL,
Maya Conquistador

A Reconstruction of Postclassic Maya World View

THE ONSET OF THE POSTCLASSIC PERIOD SAW LARGE-SCALE political reorganization in Mesoamerica as a whole concerning the right to rule.[1] Many of the major changes consisted of phasing out Classic Period individual focused rulership practices. The transformation from the Late Classic into the Early Postclassic, however, was not created in a void or in an instant as the present is always revalued according to past social structures.[2] The transitions from the Classic to Postclassic were not composed of traditions invented wholesale. When we apply the term invention to cultural forms, we imply, wittingly or unwittingly, that traditions are concocted fiction rather than historically bound long-term social processes.[3] The very term Mesoamerican Postclassic is somewhat misleading. Postclassic implies a termination of cultural greatness following a so-named Classic; rather than a collapse of Maya culture followed by spurious cultural inventions, though, what occurred was a reformulation and transition from practices focused on individual elite rulers.[4]

The social processes leading from what we call the Classic to the Postclassic exhibit cultural elasticity. In modification there is continuity through the adaptation of what Boone calls intellectual culture, that is, ideology in the hands of individual historical agents.[5] In order for quick changes to be accepted, to achieve a short-term goal, a group of like-minded individuals can pursue a transformed ideology; the changes, however, must be at some level comprehensibly linked to elements already present in order to be widely accepted.[6] The drastic changes that transformed the noble Classic Maya world of privilege were centered on individual right to rule, but these elite changes did not alter the masses' basic cosmological framework or break their relationships with their living ancestors. The placing of ancestral figures or bundles in indexical nonfunctional houses follows a widespread practice, both spatially and temporally, throughout ancient Mesoamerica.[7] In Postclassic Yucatán there appears to be an abundance of miniature structures that seemingly were conceptualized as ancestor houses.[8] Ancestor veneration appears to be quite common at the Postclassic

site of Mayapán, where statue icons, for example, were placed in the recessed areas of various ministructures.[9] Stelae, as noted in the previous chapter, were sometimes also placed in recessed areas of certain structures as well as in associated niches.

The use of stelae during the Postclassic appears to be a transformed practice from that of the Classic. Stelae during the Postclassic tend to be mostly uncarved and were instead stuccoed, painted, or sometimes both. Newsome states that the secondary signification linked to stelae after rulership was that of the seasons, fertility, and other botanical metaphors.[10] Postclassic stelae indexicalities have their root in the Classic, and what follows is concerned with the continuity of their second signification per the above.[11] The practice of quadripartitioning as related to stelae continued into the Late Postclassic.[12] Though such monoliths were still being erected, sometimes in recycled form,[13] depictions of rulers are difficult to detect because of high erosion and the imagery being stuccoed and painted rather than carved in Classic Period relief style.[14] Despite the lack of readily available Postclassic stelae iconography, the imagery of lords conducting rituals is still perceptible on some of them.[15] We can assume that elites, although now sharing rulership, were still very much in charge of stelae erection. Stuart has noted the marking of stelae as if they were stood-up censers, and, as Masson stated, the heavy use of *incensarios* and the revitalization of stelae-associated activity coincided with what might be a pilgrimage type of practice in relation to the city of Mayapán.[16] The lack of authoritarian rulers during the Postclassic meant that stelae would no longer be dedicated in honor of individuals but to a combined ancestry that linked elite lineages; some Classic Period stelae may never have been directly linked to individual rulers either, as they apparently bore no inscription or decoration.[17]

Ancestors were communicated with during the Postclassic and Contact Periods through stelae dedication and associated rituals through a ritual medium referred to as a Jaguar Priest. Such appears to be the case at the last known dedicated stela at the site of Tayasal that the Itzá Maya erected. Note that Tayasal, the last independent Maya polity, did not succumb to the Spaniards until 1697.[18] The context of Stela I indicates that this monolith may have been reset and had cyclical rites performed at its base. Associated sherds and part of an effigy incensario are evidence that rituals were performed at the base of this stela.[19] The Postclassic northern Yucatán Maya continued to erect monoliths, and their dedication continued to be based on quadripartitioned, that is whole and quartered, k'atun counts as Newsome noted for the Classic.[20] The *Chilam*



figure 3.2:
Dresden Western Acanté Tree-Stela.
ART GENERATED BY THE AUTHOR AFTER TAUBE (1993:72).



figure 3.3:
Madrid Acanté Tree-Stela.
ART GENERATED BY THE AUTHOR AFTER PAXTON (2001:41).

Balam of Tizimin, for example, records that *uabal bin hetz'bal tz'ocebal u cuch k'atun*—pillars will be seated at the finishing of the burden of the k'atun.[21] Landa indirectly mentioned practices associated with stelae,[22] and they are known to have persisted at least until 1697 at Tayasal,[23] where the base mask of Stela 1 is considered to have been a communicating object.[24] Other evidence linking stelae to stone tree rituals, associated with centrality and intercardinal directions, is found in the Postclassic to Iberian contact Dresden Codex on page 27 (fig. 3.2)[25] and the Tro-Cortesianus Madrid Codex on page 90b (fig. 3.3) that depict *acanté* (stone-pillar trees).[26]

Spanish Conquest Chronicles as Sources for Maya Symbolic Reconstruction

Much reconstruction of Postclassic and Colonial Maya cosmology has been based on the following sources: the Franciscan bishop of Mérida, Yucatán, Diego de Landa's *Relación de las Cosas de Yucatán*, the *Books of Chilam Balam*, the four surviving Postclassic Maya codices, and the southern highlands colonial K'iché Maya *Popol Vuh* epic. With the exception of Bernardino de Sahagún's central Mexican work,[27] Diego de Landa's *Relación de las Cosas de Yucatán* is one of the most complete works detailing native Mesoamerican life shortly after Spanish contact.[28] Landa wrote his manuscript around 1566 while back in Spain facing charges of abuse upon the Maya under his jurisdiction. Landa's original manuscript was lost after his death, and only a fragment of his work has ever been recovered, but through his chronicle we have great insight as to how the Yucatán Maya lived. As will be noted in chapters 4, 5, and 6, there are great similarities between some rituals Landa recorded and those that ethnographers in the twentieth century have documented for the Maya.[29]

Alfred Tozzer is considered to be the best translator and interpreter of Diego de Landa's chronicle to date, and his version contains many detailed notes that virtually rival Landa's own descriptions.[30] In addition, Tozzer appended to his translation of Landa several important *historias*, or chronicles, from other Spanish writers. These chronicles are Antonio de Herrera's 1601 *Historia General de los Hechos de los Castellanos en las Islas y Tierra Firme del Mar Océano*, Tomás López Medel's 1612 *Relación*, Gaspar Antonio Chi's 1582 *Relación*, and Cervantes de Salazar's *Crónica de la Nueva España*. Other chronicles of major importance are the Books of *Chilam Balam*, Jaguar Prophet, which are annals of the Maya. These books represent the carrying over into the colonial period of the ancient tradition of Maya *d'zibo'ob*, priest-scribes, writing their polity's histories as linked to cosmology. The *Chilam Balam* manuscripts are usually interpreted as being quasi-historical and semi-cosmological in nature. The major difference between pre-Columbian codices and the colonial *Chilam Balam* books is their use of the Latin alphabet as opposed to using the hieroglyphic script. The *Chilam Balam* books that have survived to the present, however, are considered to be copies of what was originally written in glyphic form.[31]

There are eighteen known *Chilam Balam* books, but only some are known to have been copied. These are the *Chumayel*, the *Tizimin*, the *Kaua*, the *Ixil*, the *Tekax*, the *Nah*, the *Tusik*, and the *Mani* (sometimes called the *Pérez*). Other *Chilam Balam*-style books were mentioned in Spanish chronicles, but

their location is unknown.[32] Most every Maya village had a resident *Balam*-like priest such as, for example, an *ah k'in*, he of the sun, or *j'meen*, one who knows ritual, who probably had or has one of these types of manuscripts. The tradition of Maya villages having ah d'zib'ob, scribes, may be the reason Maya rebels were able to write communiqués to one another and to the Yucatec military during the Social War of Yucatán that I will discuss at length in chapter 4.[33] Of the many pre-Columbian Maya codices that existed at Spanish contact, only four are known to survive: the Dresden, the Paris, the Madrid, and the Grolier. All these extant codices have been dated from the Late Postclassic to Iberian contact and are thought to derive from the Yucatán region. These codices, for the most part, are concerned with calendrics and associated rituals.[34]

The Maya Codices, Hieroglyphic Writing, and World View

All four extant Maya codices, despite their differences in appearance, seem to present similar, although not identical, information.[35] Of special note regarding these codices is that Landa's accounts regarding year bearers appear to be corroborated by scenes depicted in the Madrid.[36] Still, much of the codical iconographic content, despite the volumes of articles and books written concerning the Maya, to a great degree remains enigmatic.[37] Why? Much iconography and many glyph readings remain elusive in part because Mayan hieroglyphs follow the writing principle known as polyvalence, that is, glyphs may have multiple phonetic values, and one sound may be represented by more than one glyph.[38] Another reason, to which I give more importance, is that we still have a poor understanding regarding Maya notions of self and personhood. What a person is and how this reflects on concepts of embodiment and the self is culturally constructed and not a universal mind-set. How the Maya understood other beings, visible and invisible, as well as all what surrounded them cannot be grasped very well until we better comprehend their notion of person within their cosmological frameworks and behavioral environments.

As Maya studies have accelerated, we are rapidly learning more about how their cosmology permeated their societal structure.[39] Maya religion, as delineated in chapter 1, was inseparable from day-to-day activities, whether related to socioeconomics, politics, or warfare.[40] While glyphic decipherment continues at a brisk pace, there is still much to be understood from these Postclassic codices. The glyphic accounts contribute to a more accurate historical reconstruction for the Maya. The ancient Maya script was composed of a mixture of

phonetic signs and logograms that gave the Maya the capability to write down their histories with impressive accuracy.[41] The Mayan script has been demonstrated to be extremely flexible, dynamic, efficient, and likened to contemporary Asian writing systems such as the Japanese syllabaries.[42] Harris and Stearns, as well as Houston, have noted that all Mayan hieroglyphs are iconographical in nature whether they be logograms, that is, highly pictographic in representation, or mostly phonetic.[43]

The ancient Maya could write anything they wished and chose to document what only relatively recently has been understood to be actual historical events.[44] In order to proceed and better explain my thesis on communicating objects, I synthesize in the following how iconography has allowed a better understanding and reconstruction of ancient Maya cosmology. The best approach to such a historical synthesis is an interdisciplinary one through archaeology, ethnohistory, ethnography, linguistics, art history, and religious studies.[45] One thing to keep in mind here is that the Maya are to be noted as much for what they decided to write and depict as for what they chose not to: both required decisions in terms of relative importance and need.

Glyphs, Iconography, and Maya History: A Step Back to Move Forward

Most interest in the Maya began after John Lloyd Stephens published his travels in the Yucatán and Central America in 1841. Stephens's publications included superb artistic renderings by Frederick Catherwood as he tried to depict the ruins of a lost civilization in southern Mexico and Central America.[46] From these works began an intense interest, in both the United States and Europe, in trying to understand who had built these great pyramids in the jungle, who and what were depicted in the associated monumental artwork, and why they had been constructed. Many of these questions centered on what had happened to the builders of these ancient monuments, despite Stephens's speculation that the indigenous people surrounding the ruins were the descendants of these ancient cities' architects and builders.[47] While studying Diego de Landa's *Relación* in conjunction with three of the Postclassic codices, Charles Brasseur de Bourbourg, one of the first iconographers of Maya imagery, established that a main recurring theme was that of Chaak, the Maya rain patron.[48]

Other Europeans, including many Germans, perhaps because the Dresden Codex was housed in Germany, began to intensively study the Maya codices as

well. Ernst Förstmann delineated the structure and identity of what he saw as Maya deities within the Dresden Codex while also working out how ancient Maya calendrics functioned.[49] Eduard Seler, who began to compare the Maya codices to their central Mexican counterparts, noticed the existence of similar iconographic patterns and conventions, making further essential contributions.[50] Seler was in part able to conduct the extensive studies of both the Maya and central Mexico regions because he was a linguist trained in both the Mayan and Nahuatl languages.[51] He was the first to recognize that Venus calendrics in the Maya codices corresponded to Venus lore amongst the peoples of Mexico as well as the colors associated with the world directions that Léon de Rosny had previously identified in glyph form: *chik'iin* (west)—*ek'* (black), *lak'iin* (east)—*chak* (red), *xaman* (north)—*sak* (white), *nohol* (south)—*k'an* (yellow), and *yax* (blue-green)—*chúumuk* (center).[52] A third German during this time, Paul Schellhas, began a more systematic identification and labeling of all the ancient Maya nonhuman patrons appearing in the codices.[53] Karl Taube has continued and updated Schellhas's work with his extensive and insightful iconographic research.[54]

Not until the pioneering work of Yuri Knorosov on Maya hieroglyphic phoneticism, using Landa's hieroglyphic Mayan alphabet, however, did our general understanding of the history of the Maya begin to emerge and take shape.[55] At this time Tatiana Proskouriakoff and David Kelley began to apply Knorosov's insight into their work on Mayan glyph decipherment with much success.[56] Proskouriakoff was the first to demonstrate that in their artwork and writing, the Maya were not simply referring to calendrics and abstract ideas but were writing their cosmologically charged sociopolitical history.[57] She later demonstrated that Maya scribes were writing their polity's dynastic histories as composed of elite births and deaths, battles, taking of captives, and marriage alliances as set within their cosmological world views.[58] Heinrich Berlin later complemented Proskouriakoff's work by demonstrating the great extent of interaction among the ancient Maya cities both far and near. He identified what are called emblem glyphs, that is, polity toponyms, in written texts that described ambassadors' visits and war events as historically tied to specific cities.[59]

The Mayan hieroglyphic script follows patterns and conventions, but the inscriptions are also extremely highly multivocalic and stylized according to the artistic creativity of individual scribes. The creativity of Maya scribes was set within an indigenous framework, not that of the Spanish. Despite this, rather than trying to gain an understanding of the codices' content, often seen

as influenced by deceptive demons, the colonial friars preferred to burn the Mesoamerican codices to make religious and political statements in accord with their spiritual conquest ideology. The combination of archaeology, iconography, epigraphy, astronomy, history, and ethnography has created a synthesis of what ancient Maya religion supposedly was and to some extent what traditional Maya religion is. These reconstructions are, however, often tainted by Judeo-Christian viewpoints from the legacy Spanish colonists left us.[60]

Colonial-Period Maya and Spanish-Roman Catholic World Views

The Spanish chronicles are invaluable in aiding our comprehension of Mesoamerican world views, but caution should be taken when mining their highly prejudiced information.[61] Landa's *Relación*, for example, although crucial to our studies contains many biases.[62] His main informant, Gaspar Chi, although Maya, was taught by the Spanish at a young age, becoming so acculturated to the Iberian Roman Catholic faith that he adopted Christian views and terminologies.[63] Although we need to use Spanish chronicles to better our understanding of Native American world views, these should be used with caution and not taken at face value.

The conquest of the Maya peoples was a centuries–long, incomplete protracted process.[64] During the initial conquest period, many Spaniards noticed that the Mayas had structures containing objects with crosslike icons (fig. 3.1). Díaz del Castillo, for example, describes entering a Maya building during his 1514 expedition to the Yucatán: "On the walls were figured the bodies of many great serpents and other pictures of evil-looking idols. These walls surrounded a sort of altar covered with clotted blood. On the other side of the idols were symbols like crosses, and all were colored."[65] Two such structures at Cozumel held such objects,[66] and according to López de Gómara, Hernán Cortés's secretary back in Spain:

> In a province called Maya . . . [on an island] the natives call . . . Acuzamil, corruptly Cozumel . . . there was a wall of stone and mortar, very well built, with battlements, and at its center a plaster cross about ten spans high, which they held to be the god of rain and worshiped as such; and when water was scarce and the rains failed, they went to it in very devout processions and sacrificed . . . They also burned before it a certain resin, like incense, and sprinkled it with water, in the belief that rain would

> fall . . . Such was the religion of these people of Cozumel, but it could not be learned how or in what manner they had acquired their devotion to the Cross . . . They were very reverent in the presence of the Cross, as if accustomed to this symbol.[67]

Landa mentions communicating objects at both Cozumel and Chichén Itzá,[68] and according to Roys, the side structure along Chichén Itzá's great cenote probably housed one of these objects.[69] López de Cogolludo claims that one of the Cozumel objects was large, hollow, and had a rear entry that enabled a Maya priest to enter and supposedly deceive the gullible into believing the object literally spoke.[70] Attributing the voice of assumed talking idols to deceptive ventriloquism, however, is perhaps too cynical since Native Americans often care for effigies, communicate with nonhuman beings through these objects, and produce their emanating voices.[71] So widespread in fact was the use of communicating objects throughout the indigenous Americas that the Spaniards believed the devil himself deceived Native Americans through their use of these supposed oracles.[72]

The Maya rulers' caretaking, communicating, and feeding of ancestral beings in the form of objects has been noted for the cross group shrines at Palenque as well as being a wide Mesoamerican practice.[73] Burials containing vessels with quadripartite-cross motifs appear early in Mesoamerica's archaeological record and appear related to elite accumulation of power through evocational practices.[74] Stone has suggested that ancient Maya elite females sometimes evoked ancestors in metaphysical sexual encounters, and I have documented that contemporary Maya women are thought to sometimes be impregnated by sentient invisible entities associated with communicating crosses.[75] Significantly, as related to lineage and kinship, the Palenque cross group structures exhibit fertility overtones identifying them as indexical nonfunctional birthing places.[76] Mesoamerica's Preclassic, Classic, and Postclassic Periods, and the colonial era are composed of transformed traditions that are identifiable from core elements and key metaphors that overlap these academically defined time periods.[77]

Maya civilization did not cease after the Classic Period but was restructured and continued to express itself in varied manifestations during the Postclassic.[78] One conspicuous florescence of Maya revival occurred in the northern Yucatán Peninsula as centered in the cities of Uxmal, Chichén Itzá, Kobá, and much later, Mayapán.[79] Polities in the Yucatán Peninsula, despite existing rivalries,

shared cosmological and iconographic styles through an exchange of goods and ideas that were introduced through an extensive canoe-based trade network.[80] These canoe merchants carried cacao beans and copper bells for barter, and it is these traders Christopher Columbus would later encounter on his reconnaissance of the American shores.[81]

Spanish and Maya Two-Way Acculturation

Not until a decade after Columbus's encounter with the trading-canoe merchants off the Honduran coast in 1502 was another full expedition launched to these shores. The expedition of 1511 proved ill fated, as it shipwrecked off the Yucatán coast and left the stranded Spaniards vulnerable to Maya attacks. Many of them were lost in the shipwreck, and the Maya captured those surviving. One of the captured was Gerónimo de Aguilar, who was enslaved for seven years and later, having learned the Mayan language and escaped his captors, became one of Cortés's translators. Another of these Spanish captives was Gonzalo Guerrero, who later became known for marrying a Maya woman. Gonzalo Guerrero is reputed to have had children with his Maya wife and then later to have taken sides with the Maya against his own countrymen.[82] Perhaps because of the 1511 shipwreck, not until 1517 did another expedition set sail to the Yucatán, this time led by Francisco Hernández de Córdoba.

Hernández de Córdoba landed at Ecab in the northeast corner of the Yucatán and later at Champotón on the southwest gulf coast. Next in this line of scattered expeditions was Juan de Grijalva's to the island of Cozumel in 1518.[83] This pattern of sporadic expeditions to the Yucatán continued for decades. Once the Spaniards gained a stronghold in the Yucatán Peninsula, they began to undertake a colonization process for the Maya similar to the one they used for the Nahuas of central Mexico. Their smaller presence in the Yucatán than in central Mexico detrimentally affected their control of these indigenous populations, however.[84] Another reason the Maya did not succumb as easily to Spanish control was that the polities of Yucatán were not organized under one empire. The Maya peoples of the Yucatán at the time of Iberian contact were for the most part loosely organized around small lineage units and had the eastern and southern rain forest in which to escape subjugation. These appear to be prime reasons why most of the Yucatán Maya still use indigenous surnames as opposed to the central Mexicans who were forced to adopt those of the Spaniards.[85]

Spanish-Roman Catholic and Maya Hybridity: Syncretism?

During the colonial period, Spanish friars tended to impose so many Iberian-Roman Catholic categories onto Mesoamerican frameworks that making distinctions between the two world views is somewhat difficult.[86] While many world religions share similarities, this does not make them the same, and their differences are what is key to comprehending them on their own terms. I find it highly unlikely that two drastically different world views like Roman Catholicism and Maya, having historically evolved separately over millennia and each being its own historical syncretic-hybrid product, are practically indistinguishable since contact.[87] The term syncretic continues to be applied as if by contrast there ever were a pure culture or religion. The concept of syncretism fails to describe actual human and historical processes because it implies that some cultures, typically those holding hegemonic power over others, are not syncretic when, in fact, all cultures and religions are subject to this social process.[88]

Key differences between Iberian Roman Catholicism and Native American cosmologies become evident if their world views are analyzed in-depth historically.[89] Thompson states that the Maya tended to adapt Spanish secular objects into their indigenous frameworks, and the Itzá Maya of Nojpeten-Tayasal, for example, are known to have transformed Cortés's dead horse's bones into a communicating object.[90] They named these bones Tzimin Chaak, horse of thunder and lightning, and kept them as a communicating bundle until approximately 1697.[91] The Itzá Maya caring for the bones of Cortés's horse follows a Maya emphasis on using communicating objects before and after Spanish conquest and exemplifies the presence of nonhuman persons for these peoples.[92]

Communications by Itzá Maya ritual objects appear related to the governance of Nojpeten-Tayasal and its quadripartitioned provinces by their ruler, Ajau Kan Ek.'[93] Curiously, the imagery on some Mesoamerican material objects with quad-cross motifs sometimes depicts a mouth, as if the communicating object in question were actually speaking (figs. 2.7, 2.8, 2.9). An allusion to a quad sense of place, the keeping of vessels with quadripartite motifs to use to communicate with ancestors is an archaic Maya tradition. For the colonial Maya, as Restall noted, ancestors retained vital connections with their living descendants, and "the head played an important iconographic role . . . as carved or drawn images of heads represented the ongoing significance and presence of revered ancestors."[94] This practice was reciprocally based on social debt and merit relationships that the Spaniards apparently never understood in their campaign against supposed Maya idolatry.

Supposed Worship of False Gods and Confession by Torture

I have elsewhere noted[95] that despite not all Spaniards fully agreeing with the Roman Catholic friars' coercive tactics against the Maya, many nevertheless considered their harsh actions just.[96] The Mayas' fear of Franciscan interrogatory methods was very great, and some would run off upon knowing that friars were visiting their villages.[97] The Iberian Holy Inquisition as a highly disturbing and barbaric interrogation practice used against Muslims and Jews who had converted to Roman Catholicism has received much attention by researchers.[98] The same cannot be said about New Spain's inquisitional practices.[99] Torture as an interrogation practice, contrary to appealing opinions, can be highly ineffective; there is a significant boundary between free confessions and evidence gathered under forceful and painful tactics.[100] Roman Catholic inquisitors apparently did not often use torture in seeking real answers in inquiries concerning assumed heresy but as punishment based on political motivations.[101] Furthermore, as Restall stated, Franciscan friars went through great "mental gymnastics . . . to justify to themselves the entire brutal endeavor."[102]

Roman Catholic friars often accused the Mayas, and other Native Americans, of knowingly taking part in practicing idolatry, and these accusations have often been accepted uncritically, without regard for Spanish ideological motivations.[103] Clendinnen has indicated the many political prejudices in the Spanish chronicles, and she and Tedlock as well have argued against uncritical acceptance of Mayan confessions forcefully obtained by psychological and physical coercion.[104] Restall cites graphic examples of the Roman Catholic friars' coercive methods, in contextualizing inquisitorial torture and confession tactics, as used against supposedly converted to Roman Catholicism Mayas:

> They began to torture us, hanging us by the hands and flogging us cruelly, hanging weights of stone on our feet, torturing many of us on the rack [*en burros*], pouring a great quantity of water into our bodies, from which tortures many of us died or were maimed . . . [this due to us being accused] that we were idolaters . . . and other things far from all truth . . . We saw ourselves maimed by cruel tortures . . . [there were] many dead of them [us], and robbed of our property . . . They seized and imprisoned us in chains, like slaves, in the monastery at Merida, where many of us died; and there they told us that we were to be burned, without our knowing why.[105]

Despite the cruelty described by Restall's quote above, he further states that inquisitional torture "was actually worse than this account suggests,"[106] and for this reason some Mesoamericans preferred death to being subjected to Spanish interrogation.[107] Confessions extracted in a coercive manner do not result in accurate information reflecting actual actions or beliefs.[108] The Mayas, furthermore, did not likely comprehend what their inquisitors were specifically asking because their world views were so conspicuously distinct. Mesoamerican world views are based on interrelational lived experience reflecting their practical daily world knowledge as focused upon discrete and metaphorical observations of their surroundings.[109] Mesoamerican world views, as I delineated in chapter 1, do not tend to be based on a religion in a Christian theological sense or on subdivisions and categories in accord with our scientific Cartesian classifications.[110] Knab has admitted in this regard that

> it is we, as Westerners, who seek neat schemes with traditional labels for these esoteric concepts . . . At the time of the conquest, the friars—though sophisticated in theology—were burdened with the views of the Spanish renaissance humanism, [and] the Reformation . . . completely lacked the techniques necessary to analyze . . . Mesoamerican concepts . . . [that] were thickets of metaphor and homophony.[111]

Tuns Within K'atuns: The Counting of Days and Years

Native American cosmologies are not homogenous. The shared concepts of these populations, who have been in conversation for millennia through trade and other forms of social contact before the Spanish conquest, have much in common, though, in terms of core homophonies and metaphors.[112] They can therefore be categorized within one broad New World ontological system identifiable by similar core elements.[113] Native American sense of being often expresses what Morrison calls "negotiated agreements about the pluralistic nature of reality."[114] Native Americans tend to view their place in the world as relational to other beings, visible and invisible, with which they are in frequent communication. These communications are not always in verbal form and can take the shape of decorations, requests, song, dance, and offerings that are often focused upon what we would classify as inanimate objects.[115] For the ancient Maya, this practice is visible in their relational and communicative interaction with ceramic vessels, staffs, bones, and a variety of bundled objects that are often linked to the

quad motif and the ancestors. According to Freidel, Schele, and Parker, "The old [ancient Maya] statues also spoke through the written word. The old word for the human agent was *chilan*, 'translator,' . . . The tradition of talking statues certainly goes back to Pre-Columbian times."[116] This communication between humans and noncorporeal persons is often linked to quadripartitioning, the well-being of community, the passage of time, and what we consider mythic-historical events.

The ancient Maya had a deep concern with the articulation among humans, invisible beings, the movement of the heavens, and the passing of time. To keep track of the long-term passage of years, the ancient Maya devised a calendar Mayanists refer to as the Long Count. The Long Count calendar was based on a progressive day count from what is believed to be a mythological date of 2 August 3114 BC. According to Miller and Taube, the following Long Count units of time were known to be used at least up until Spanish contact: the *k'in* = one day; the *uinal* = 20 k'ins; the tun = one year composed of 360 k'ins plus five extra k'ins, called the *huayeb*; the k'atun = 20 tuns; the *bak'tun* = 20 k'atuns; the *pik'tun* = 20 bak'tuns; and the *k'alabtun* = 20 pik'tuns.[117] Despite the current New Age fascination with the ending of the Long Count on December 21, 2012, and regardless of the fact that the Maya peoples stopped using this exact count about a thousand years ago, what is important for this work is that the Long Count was based on an upward count of days. A k'in, as shown above, equals one day, and its meaning is derived from each solar day's passing. K'in in effect means sun, and as will be elaborated later, the sun is the core signifier from which quadripartitioning stems. The sun is linked to the ancestors, and this in effect is why many celebrations, terminations, and commencements are associated with it and the quad motif.

The Classic Maya apparently commemorated all Long Count units. The k'atun count seems to also stand out, however, because of its long-term regularity. The Long Count was apparently not kept in its entirety during the Postclassic, and emphasis was switched over to k'atun counts and their cyclical repetition in batches of thirteen.[118] Each k'atun is the equivalent of twenty years, or seventy-two hundred days, and it is these cycles of thirteen repeating k'atuns that concern some colonial Maya documents. The *Chilam Balam of Tizimin*, for example, runs from 1441 to 1848 and ended in the year it supposedly predicted was to be the beginning of the Social War of Yucatán.[119] According to Edmonson, the *Chilam Balam*, Jaguar Spokesman, was the "prophet of the K'atun cycle," and it was his responsibility to keep the count of days and communicate and interpret the cycles.[120]

The ancient Maya appear to have developed many of these esoteric intricacies as part of reckoning time renewals on the day named Ahau. Ahau was one of the twenty calendrical day names in the Maya Tzolk'in 260-day count.[121] This pattern of keeping time was entrenched in ancient cosmology, and some remnants of this mode of thought have continued to the present day.[122] Many contemporary Maya sense time as being cyclical rather than continually linear.[123] Bricker mentions that the beginning of the Social War of Yucatán coincided with the seating of a K'atun 9 ahau.[124] Edmonson also stresses the importance of the day Ahau in the *Chilam Balam of Chumayel*, saying that "the last K'atun mentioned in the Chumayel is 9 Ahau, which began in 1848 . . . The word K'atun not only meant 'two dozen years,' it also meant 'war.'"[125] I do not consider it a coincidence that both the Tizimin and the Chumayel end in approximately 1848, thus marking the approximate historical beginning of the Social War of Yucatán. According to Love, "Historical events were recorded by naming k'atuns and tuns within k'atuns." K'atun counts, then, were used to record prophecies as linked to events in the past, the present, and those yet to transpire.[126]

Maya calendric counts are clearly linked to politics and ideological use of cosmological themes. It was no wonder that the colonial Roman Catholic friars, as noted previously, were so politically determined to punish by torture what they claimed was the worship of idols. Landa, for example, in an apparent reference to ancestor houses, condemns the assumed idol worship found all over the Maya communities under his jurisdiction.[127] Tozzer, however, notes that such idols more than likely represented ancestors, and this implies that Landa did not truly comprehend Maya ancestor veneration.[128] Unfortunately, as McAnany has mentioned:

> European chroniclers who classified Maya society in terms of their own social background . . . evangelism . . . [and] the failure of later Mayanists to grapple with the politics of history has resulted in an uncritical use of ethnohistoric and ethnographic sources, and the sixteenth-century construct—one that was elegantly but grossly inaccurate—has lived on.[129]

Let us look briefly, then, at how we arrived at our current take on Mesoamerican religions in order to better assess my understanding of indigenous American world views and the meaning of the quad icon.

Maya Historical Ethnology

Not until the 1930s did Mayanists begin to seriously study and contextualize the work the Iberian chroniclers wrote. Roys, for example, despite what appears to be a limited knowledge of Maya cosmology, translated invaluable native historiographies and wrote excellent syntheses of Yucatec ethnohistories.[130] During the same period as Roys, Scholes coauthored excellent work regarding Yucatec ethnohistory.[131] It was their contemporary, J. Eric S. Thompson, however, who dominated Maya studies by combining his vast knowledge of iconography, calendrics, ethnohistory, and ethnography.[132] Thompson was particularly acute in acknowledging early on that the indigenes of contemporary southern Mexico and Central America were direct descendants of the ancient Maya.[133]

Thompson highly influenced the view regarding Classic Maya cosmology as a theology centered on the ruler and his city-state, with the Postclassic being characterized by a splintered, individualized religious system.[134] As clarified by Chase and Chase, however, the data presumed to exhibit dramatic changes in cosmology from the Classic to the Postclassic do not clearly demonstrate this as such and may simply indicate a broadening of Classic Period conventions. As the Chases note, "Practices presumed to be uniquely Postclassic actually have antecedents much farther back in the Classic period. And, continuity, rather than disjunction, may be found between the Classic and Postclassic patterns."[135] Also, as McAnany notes, "social practices can be studied both in their historical specificity and across the space-time continuum . . . The boundaries between the past and the present are rarely as absolute as the western positivist perspective would suggest. There are certain societal structures . . . that persevere and, in fact, transcend historical incident."[136] Any claim, in fact, as to the impermeability of the different Mesoamerican time periods flies in the face of a well–documented, ancient-to-present pan-Mesoamerican heritage and Maya cultural logic.[137]

The common background of core Native American world-view cosmologies seems to stem from the experience of humans interacting with nonhumans. Subsistence and fertility furnish metaphors, and in much of North America this is based on maize agriculture. Corn to this day remains the seed that is the nucleus and sustains the bond within many indigenous Mesoamerican peasant cosmologies.[138] Understanding the continuity of Mesoamerican world views as based on mostly three things—the ecology, reciprocal communication with the noncorporeal persons, and a quadripartitioned sense of genealogical place and home—makes possible an ordering and simplification of indigenous epistemologies.

By circuitous paths over long periods of direct and indirect means of contact, these core ideas contributed to the shared development of what might be termed a Native American cosmology. The variability of what often appears as conflicting, contradictory, or confusing is simply because Native American cosmologies are not strictly codified according to doctrines and dogmas as set down by divine prophets. Native American world views instead are composed of highly fluid and dynamic core patterns and conventions based on the regenerative relations of humans with nonhuman persons.

The dynamic fluidity and hybrid nature of Mesoamerican cosmologies appear to have allowed individual leaders and communities to adopt similar but varying ancestral patron beings. These nonhuman patrons, with variable names, guises, and composites, were tailor-made to suit various socioreligious and political purposes at differing historical times. Anyone working on Native American cosmologies may notice that indigenous nonhuman patrons are not discrete beings even while having key attributes; they conflate with one another with incredible variation and ease. The conflation of these noncorporeal patrons' attributes appears to be selective according to individual agency on the part of those humans who enter into reciprocal relationships with these beings and venerate them. This relational process for dealing with invisible patrons appears to be similar to the selection of ancestors, as not all deceased humans become cultural foci entailing veneration ritual.[139]

Reciprocal veneration does not equal worship. What is worshipped is in some manner respected, but not everything that is respected is worshipped. Knab and Sullivan, for example, note that what we translate as god from the Nahuatl language, for example in reference to the patron ancestor of the central Mexican Méxica known as Huitzilopochtli, simply indicates that which is wrapped and guarded.[140] Morris, furthermore, has discussed at length that ancestors are often used, that is, manipulated, by the living in non-Western societies.[141] Respect comes at a price and is not simply granted. Ancestors are not reciprocated out of human benevolence; rather veneration is granted because ancestors are useful to the living and vice versa. The ancient Maya use and manipulation of ancestors could not have been an exclusive practice only among elites. Because we have remnant ancient elite imagery depicting ancestor veneration, while we do not for non-elites, simply means the wealthy had the means to commission these works in long-lasting material culture.[142] A drastic differentiation from elite to non-elite behavior would require that two dissimilar world views, as separated only by class and wealth, should be at work within Maya society.

Such a dichotomy leaves the non-elites as simple-minded peasants having little in common with their leaders and little political understanding, let alone power, of what went on in their world.

Non-elites surely had material culture that surrounded them in their homes. For the most part, though, its construction could not have been long lasting and hence would have left little archaeological evidence behind. This is where archaeological, historical, and ethnographic comparisons with the living descendants of those being studied come into play.[143] Direct historical ethnoarchaeology analogies require a certain degree of caution, but used appropriately and with significant data, such an approach can yield rich results to better understand past behaviors. We know that into the Mesoamerican Preclassic, bundled human remains were sometimes linked to quad-crosses and crossed-bands (fig. 3.4).[144] The Postclassic central Mexican site of Coixtlahuaca has an example where a bundled and masked burial has in front of it several vessels that



figure 3.4:
Lady Nine-Grass with Crossed-Bands.
ART GENERATED BY THE AUTHOR AFTER ZOUCHE-NUTTALL (1992:44).



figure 3.5: Coixtlahuaca Bundle with Quad-Cross Vessel.
PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR.

include one having a quad-cross motif (fig. 3.5).[145] As will be shown later, there are many examples like this that cut across Mesoamerican time and space.

Mesoamericans, like all Native Americans, were eventually colonized. Despite centuries of intense pressure to assimilate, however, through creative adaptations some of these societies retained ancient religious symbolism in combination with colonial structure.[146] These hybrid combinations are not always readily discernible, and according to Knab, as well as Sandstrom, only through continuous immersion with target populations can an outsider become aware of the transformed continuities.[147] I agree. The Maya in the Yucatán, for example, continue to bundle, venerate, feed, and communicate with their ancestors, although there are Roman Catholic elements mixed in. Ancestor bundles, however, are just one of an assortment of objects that the present-day Maya use as devices to communicate with nonhuman persons. I have mentioned elsewhere[148] that Redfield and Villa Rojas in *Chan Kom: A Maya Village* dedicated a chapter to what they called and entitled the "Invisible World."[149] This invisible

world, despite its supernatural-sounding name, was the Chan Kom Maya's daily behavioral environment conceptualized as being alive with many kinds of volitional beings, human and nonhuman, where all things interacted in seen and unseen forms. Implicit in the relational interaction of a world composed of that which is visible and invisible is that the Chan Kom Maya had no category of the natural as distinct from what we call the supernatural.

Confusion as to the cosmological concepts present in Native American world views appears to stem from an unconscious taking of indigenous views as superstition and our tendency to impose Western categories upon non-Western peoples.[150] Many contemporary traditional Maya in the state of Quintana Roo, Mexico, although they know the difference, do not sharply distinguish into binaries what we define as human and nonhuman, awakened state and dreaming, life and death, and history and myth. That the Maya have what we classify as talking stones, talking trees, and talking crosses exemplifies their nonseparation of natural and supernatural realms. Furthermore, that Native Americans communicate with, and attribute volition to, beings or objects that we scientifically consider impossible to relate with. We thus categorize them as supernatural and therefore unreal and unverifiable, demonstrating that categories of impersonal and distant beings in a Judeo-Christian sense do not apply to these peoples.[151]

I have explained elsewhere[152] that Houston, Chinchilla Mazariegos, and Stuart have noted that Maya relationships to supernaturals are "still very poorly understood."[153] Here I stress, before proceeding to chapter 4, that my point is *not* whether we researchers believe Maya supernaturals *are* supernatural but whether the ancient Maya did. Rice, in coming to realize that our Western secular understandings force foreign political templates on the Maya, calls for more indigenous models in analyzing the Maya, not so as to completely discard all our previous models, but in an effort to better comprehend Maya concepts.[154] Indigenous understandings are critical if we wish to get an approximate understanding of other peoples' cosmological concepts that cannot be scientifically verified.[155]

Redfield and Villa Rojas stated that Maya invisibles, what I call nonhuman persons, were hard for them to categorize and therefore concluded that "the writers feel that there is much they do not yet understand about how the people of Chan Kom look upon the various gods and spirits." Having admitted this, unfortunately, Redfield and Villa Rojas's misunderstandings were placed upon the Maya, as they said, "but it is plain that part of the confusion is in the minds of the natives . . . There is blurring in the attributes of deities; one

deity is confounded with another."[156] As previously explained in chapter 1, however, Maya cosmology is not strictly codified in a Western theological sense, and this conception of the world is composed of interactions with the seen and the unseen. The unseen here is made visible by inexplicable actions that take place in both community and forest and attributed to often-conflated composite noncorporeal persons. The Balams and the Chaaks, for example, move invisibly through air and space; the Balamo'ob hover over the bush or at the four entranceways of the village, and the Chaako'ob are in the earth, the rain, caves, and cenote sinkholes.[157] The assumed confused blurring of attributes is not confusion for the contemporary Maya; ancient Mesoamericans, as noted previously, intentionally conflated the attributes and identity of one nonhuman patron with another.

Colonial friars' assumptions notwithstanding, there is no solid indigenous evidence for either the ancient or contemporary traditional Maya peoples' composite entities being supernatural gods. As Miller and Martin note, "Scholars have spilled a great deal of ink in their attempts to discern the 'real' from the 'supernatural' among the ancient Maya . . . Scholars use the terms god and deity to describe the subjects of Maya worship, impersonation, and emulation, but these beings were not discrete, separate entities in the way we think of Greek or Roman gods."[158] Boone, in addition, has admitted that "no pictorial distinction is made between . . . humans and supernaturals . . . The gods are not visually differentiated from the humans."[159] These sentient invisible beings that are often lineage associated are personalized nonhumans that are conceptualized as found within these people's ecological surroundings, be it the sky, ground, and or inner earth. Natural phenomena within the Native American relational world are often conceptualized as readily accessible, personalized, invisible and windlike beings found throughout the world,[160] and these are often related to mountains and caves.[161] This is true for many of my Maya consultants and appears quite similar for both the ancient and colonial Maya.

When the Spaniards truly finally conquered the Maya is subject to debate. This is especially so when one considers that indigenous world views are still extant, despite oppressive colonial tactics, and that the Republic of Yucatán and later the Mexican nation-state have still had to contend with sporadic Maya uprisings.[162] The last indigenous New World capital to be conquered, as mentioned previously, was the Itzá Maya city of Nojpeten, commonly known as Tayasal, and this polity did not succumb to the Spaniards until 1697.[163] Still, the fall of the last Maya kingdom did not mean the end of the Maya world and their

communicating objects. Despite the reluctance in some conservative quarters of academia to acknowledge what is plain to see, the indigenes of Yucatán have transformed, adapted, and continued some of their ancestors' traditions. The best-known examples of these traditions are perhaps the Mayan communicating objects known as the talking crosses of the Yucatán.

Communicating crosses, usually associated with the 1847 Social War of Yucatán, are not only extant but remain guarded in Quintana Roo villages.[164] Although Maya crosses are often misinterpreted as mostly Roman Catholic,[165] the colonial Maya referred to a cross as *che*, that is, tree.[166] Trees for the ancient Maya signified rulers and vice versa,[167] and the Maya mentioning a che could refer to an individual as well as a tree.[168] Contemporary Maya crosses can be activated, brought to life, and are often painted blue-green like the sky or water, or green like a plant. These crosses can be associated with ancestors and if so, are communicated with and sometimes placed alongside bundled human remains (fig. 6.1). These crosslike icons not only signify trees with which indigenous Maya religious specialists can communicate but also other types of plants as well. Some of these trees and plants have medicinal properties, and these types of quad-cross communicating plants are amply depicted in central Mexican codices to refer to specific places where they are plentiful. For example, the Codex Mendoza has abundant depictions of these trees and plants, and some have speech scrolls emanating from their open mouths.[169] The Yaqui talking tree or stick also seems to be related to these types of Maya crosses, plants, and trees.[170] To the variety of Mesoamerican communicating quad-crosses and their signification is where I turn next.



figure 4.1: Mayan Communicating Stela-Cross.
PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR.

CHAPTER 4

Close Encounters with Maya and Roman Catholic Crosses

It is only when the Spanish break into this dynamic scene that we question the compatibility between change and cultural survival. And in doing so, we also ignore the fact that the conquest itself was partly shaped by the pre-Columbian systems, their internal relationships, and their particular patterns of response to new challenges.

— NANCY M. FARRISS,
Maya Society Under Colonial Rule:
The Collective Enterprise of Survival

Though obviously not unchanged . . . it has to be recuperated . . . from an archaeology of enduring symbolic practice.

— JEAN COMAROFF AND JOHN L. COMAROFF,
Of Revelation and Revolution:
The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier

No religion is ever a static, given monolith. It is however true that the past, rooted, shared traditions of a given religion carry an important weight: they furnish the chief ingredients to be reworked and transformed in the process of religious change; they circumscribe and somewhat steer the efforts toward innovation; they narrow and restrict the possibilities of reformation.

— DAVÍD CARRASCO,
"Jaguar Christians in the Contact Zone"

Western History and Maya Reality

The Mayan talking cross is said to have revealed itself as a carved image on a mahogany tree next to a grotto during the Caste War of Yucatán in 1850.[1] The quad-cross tradition of the Maya is one of the most important Mesoamerican transformed continuities from the pre-Columbian period to the present. The quadripartite-cross icon for example, has been deployed to rally ethnic affirmation against Spanish colonial and Mexican state institutional structure. Looking to this extant icon and the rebellion of 1847, some contemporary Maya are seeking to mediate their position with the modern world and control their history. To imply or claim, as some scholars have, that indigenous spirituality is a pastiche of incoherent meaning and constructed from simulacra undervalues historical processes and the agency of individuals.[2] Ambiguities and contradictions are inherently present in all human behavior, but their expression does not negate prevalent social patterns on the part of actual human beings. This chapter focuses on the indexicality behind the Mayan communicating crosses of the Yucatán; their cosmological meaning; their transformation through the ages; and a juxtaposition with the Roman Catholic cross and crucifix, the tree of life, and the tree of knowledge.

The main question I have before me in this chapter is how and why the Maya cross object came to the fore during the Caste War of Yucatán. Communicating devices and cross motifs were already present, as delineated in the previous chapters, so how did the combination of communicating object and quad motif play cosmologically, historically, and ideologically during the war from within the world view of the rebel Maya? As Jones noted, our studies of this war and the associated Maya cross are not fully satisfactory; he boldly states what remains pertinent to date so I will quote him in abbreviated length:

> Studies of the Caste War of Yucatán have been particularly unsuccessful in coping with the ideological foundations of rebellion and with the ability of the leaders to recruit a passionate following that at the beginning sought accommodation and reform, not violent confrontation. Many studies of that event probably labor under a false assumption that the revitalization movement of the so-called Talking Cross, as a religious movement, actually postdated the war itself. The suggestion that the outbreak itself may have been timed by prophecy suggests otherwise . . . It should be apparent that we may have to revise old thinking

and approach the issue from a comparative perspective that takes into account the entire period since the Spanish conquest began.[3]

Jones further states that the problem stems from the fact that "these studies have tended to compartmentalize the religious and secular aspects of that rebellion . . . in the formation of the so-called cult of the Talking Cross." In effect, he points to serious deficiencies in the studies concerning this war. Part of the implied problem, I would add, is the nonuse of a holistic world-view approach.

The world-view concept is not without problems, and there are various conceptualizations of what academics describe as world view.[4] I have, and will continually, refer in this work to the concept of world view, so for the sake of clarity I will define it here. By world view I mean the philosophies that allow people to interact with other people, their environment, and the specifics of their day-to-day lived experience, that is, the cultural conditioning by the society in which a person lives. Social conditioning is the structured rational thought that guides human beings, their cultural logic or lived philosophy that is sometimes known as common sense.[5]

In this chapter I treat the Talking Cross as what appears to be its main structure within the war, as actively cast within an indigenous Maya framework of cosmological devices linked to socioeconomic and ideological functions. By ideology, as mentioned in chapter 1, I do not mean cosmology in reference to religious philosophies. While ideology and cosmology often intertwine, they are not one and the same. By here following Hall's argument that ideology is not "a dependent variable, a mere reflection of a pre-given reality in the mind," I will further distinguish between the two in order to better assess the function of the Maya cross.[6] Ideology as an independent variable depends on the balance of forces during particular historical junctures that Hall terms the "politics of signification," where certain meanings win credibility and legitimacy over others not equally exhibited or represented. Those that win credibility, and thus legitimacy, often appear to have been consciously honed and crafted to intervene and control knowledge and power, and thus what appears to be accepted is materialized through written or oral discursive practice.

Ideology is thus the political interpretation of social values or beliefs as played out in individual mind-sets and ensuing interactions among social agents. Individual ideology is incorporated within all human relations on all levels on a

daily basis. It serves to interpret and justify human actions, including extremely violent behaviors, in order to legitimize both dominant hegemonies and counterhegemonies. Ideological interpretation of religion, and not religion itself, then, is what motivates the individual consciousness of agents to take actions supporting or opposing specific societal values and norms. Ideology, therefore, is both the glue that joins and the mallet that transforms social life by adapting world views to specific historical sociopolitical circumstances. As Friedrich noted, ideology refers to ideas put into action by agents, that is, it is in essence the core of human behavioral practice.[7]

In relation to the rebellion and the Maya cross, I suggest that here is an example where the Maya world view can be explored in several social dimensions. With the Talking Cross one can gauge how cosmology, ritual, and ideology seem to have been socially interpreted, related, and practiced during the war. Rebel Maya appear to have exploited certain cosmological views in specific conjunction with communicating objects and in choosing where and how to evoke social situations that made their actions both personally and collectively powerful. The signification of reality for humans is often contested and rarely a given, even if not readily observable in the archaeological or ethnohistoric record. World view is mainly about defining one's place in the world, while ideology manifests itself as major points of political struggle in playing cosmological understandings to one's benefit. In ethnohistorical studies, we often commit the fallacy of interpreting written texts as transparent descriptions of reality ready to be translated, that is, the reading and taking of historical documents at face value. As Hall puts it, however, "reality" is not "simply a given set of facts . . . [rather it is] the result of a particular way of constructing reality."[8] For the Maya, cosmology, politics, economy, and ideology are interwoven as part of that construction of reality.

My extensive use of social theory throughout this work is intended to be conspicuous. My aim in applying an analytical framework based on ideology and representation of ancient Mesoamerican cosmologies is to better anchor in theory our understanding of Maya religious, political, and economic practice as articulated into world view. The articulation between socioeconomic conditions and political ideology, as played out in human action that lead to historical events, neither guarantees a particular outcome or how said forces are constituted in individual practice.[9] Applying Hall's ideas on signification to a Maya iconology of indexes, it becomes apparent that the particular discursive formulations of imagery are not always solely replete with overarching personal

biases; rather the images are generated and deployed from within a matrix of indigenous Mesoamerican concepts.[10] In the following ethnoarchaeological approach, I will be combining archaeology with an anthropological history of the Maya to better gain an understanding of the difference between their cosmology and their ideology as they pertained to their crosses. Traditional Maya ritual in conservative communities stems from their cosmological world view, what Broda in part prefers to call Mesoamerica cosmovision.[11] Here I will relate the cross to Maya sociopolitical conditions as explored within their cultural dimensionality.

Contemporary Communicating Maya Crosses

Talking crosses are devices some Maya in the Yucatán Peninsula use to communicate with nonhuman beings. Following Furbee, I tend to use the less loaded term communicating in referring to objects usually termed as talking or as being oracles.[12] While the pertinent literature refers to Maya communicating crosses as talking, no Maya I have spoken with on this subject either states or appears to believe that crosses or any other similar objects have vocal capabilities. Maya crosses *do not* and *cannot* talk. Much has been written, repeated, and affirmed concerning the Caste War of Yucatán and the Talking Cross. Sullivan has admitted, however, that regardless of how much has been written on this theme, the Maya rarely recognize themselves in what we report concerning them, their ancestors, and their history. Concerning the Mayas, "Truth, it seems, must yield to interest, power, and prejudice."[13] Careaga Viliesid has also admitted, in a manner somewhat similar to Sullivan, that various terms we use to describe these Maya and their history are not correct. For example, many of the Maya not only fail to recognize but also reject outright terms historians coined, like Caste War, Cruzob, Talking Cross, and Chan Santa Cruz.[14] The many problems with the modern history of the rebel Maya and their crosses perhaps stem from Baqueiro Preve's writings, which the Republic of Yucatán paid for at the time, on the "valiant Yucatecan troops" and the "barbaric Indian enemy."[15]

The battles known in our history books as the Caste War of Yucatán officially lasted from 1847 until 1910. History, whether oral or written, is often written according to political context, and the literature regarding this war is no exception. All history has political spin. For the contemporary Maya, the war in which their grandfathers fought had little in actuality to do with caste. Politicians, anthropologists, and historians are the ones who have randomly and

indiscriminately used the casual phrase caste war in reference to any indigenous insurrection in Mexico and Central America.[16] Any extensive literature review concerning the Social War of 1847 readily reveals that no one condition, and certainly not that of caste, was responsible for this great rebellion.[17] The causes of this war and its long-term continuation were highly complex and multifaceted. Bergunza Pinto, apparently for the above reasons, prefers to use the more apt name Social War instead of Caste War, and I follow suit, also in accord with the example of my Maya consultants.[18] What does all this have to do with the ancient quadripartite-cross motif, the Maya Social War, and the Talking Cross? Plenty. Following Bricker,[19] José María Barrera, a deserter from the Yucatecan Republic's military, did not invent the Talking Cross in 1850, as is often assumed.[20]

Reed affirms,[21] using Barrera as evidence for the invention of the Talking Cross and apparently following Zimmerman,[22] that the rebel Mayas established a new society and religion based on this cross. Trying to establish the newness of this society, Reed coins the now habitually applied name of Cruzob for these Maya rebels.[23] The nickname Cruzob seemingly has its logic insofar as the rebels were supposedly devoted to the cross. Given that *o'ob* is a plural marker in Mayan, however, the term Cruzob in effect means what Reed himself concedes to just be crosses.[24] Phrases and significance applied ad hoc in this manner to those having little political recourse seems of little use in our studies and have no scientific value.[25] No Maya with whom I have ever conversed have validated or used the term cruzob in reference to themselves, their ancestors, or anyone else. The point here is not polemics but to stress that native understandings are important in our studies.

Farriss has extensively mentioned that the determination of the Maya peoples against those who would subjugate them has its backbone in their indigenous world views.[26] Historical documents relating to the Social War of 1847 mostly represent the views of the Spanish creoles with power. The quotidian life of the rebels and their extended families, where resistance often lies in the shadows, does not headlines make and is difficult for ethnohistorians to access. The reified reconstructed history for this war has been extremely one-sided, and the indigenous cosmological epistemologies of the Maya have been given short shrift.[27] Communicating objects have often been the foci of mediation for the Maya amongst themselves as well as with the Iberian, Yucatecan, and Mexican governments. The significance of these objects extends far beyond their respective home communities, for their indexicality is shared throughout much of indigenous Mesoamerica. Modern Maya crosses have traits that stem from Roman

Catholicism, but history and religion did not arrive in Mesoamerica with the Spaniards. The infamous Talking Cross of 1850 could not have been anything new to the Maya people. It certainly was something new to the Yucatecan creoles, however, hence its novelty and the attention given to it during the war. Communicating objects are not a phenomenon restricted solely to the Yucatán Peninsula, and the Maya cross is an object far more complex than is usually acknowledged.

My focus, as I further link this chapter to the previous three, is the function of core symbols found in material culture that retain their significance both temporally and spatially. In the following I explain why the pre-Columbian quadripartite-cross motif remains important within present-day Maya cultural logic. I use a varied methodological form of analysis based on archaeology and history to look at previously mentioned ancient imagery about which I make analogies by adding ethnographic data, my own as well as that of other scholars, researched and compiled in Maya villages. The present-day Maya communicating cross device is derived from a colonial-period hybrid consisting of the pre-Columbian quad-cross icon and the Roman Catholic Latin cross. The Talking Cross was nothing new or an invention stemming from the Social War of Yucatán: Maya cosmology has included quadripartite icons and communicating objects in rudimentary form since pre-Columbian times.

The pre-Columbian cross motif was revitalized during the Social War of Yucatán. Because of an ever-increasing tourism and religious conversion rate, it now exists in a slightly different context from the military insurrection from which it reemerged in vigorous form. That the presence of these objects and the quad-cross motif remain strong within indigenous world views indicates their great importance. The quad-cross motif and communicating objects direct the Maya peoples to their ancestors as guides to their uncertain future. That links to the past as evidence for cultural continuity may make some researchers uncomfortable is regrettable. All the ancient imagery depicting the quad-cross motif in relation to ancestors will not simply vanish as different academic theories fall in and out of fashion, however.

The Cosmography of Symbolic Forms and the Iconology of the Maya Cross

The pertinent literature assumes that the Talking Cross first revealed itself historically during the Social War of Yucatán in the year 1850.[28] In addition to this

historical note of the supposed appearance of the Maya cross, which I regard as being of major importance, is the significance many contemporary Maya give to the cross in relation to the war and their daily lives. The famous cross shrines that were built during the Social War[29] remain active.[30] Some of my consultants who keep these communicating devices often relate to their quad-crosses not as objects but as if persons.[31] The meaning of many Maya household and shrine crosses differs in effect from the religious significance associated with Roman Catholic crucifixes.[32] Based on my ethnographic, archaeological, and iconographic research,[33] Maya crosses reflect historically traditional elements rooted in ancient Maya cosmology and ideology, as Spanish chroniclers documented them,[34] coinciding with colonial Spanish Roman Catholicism and more recent conventions.[35]

The widespread and abundant display of crosslike imagery in the pre-European-contact Americas has not gone unnoticed by scholars[36] or some Christian sects claiming Native Americans are the lost tribes of Israel.[37] The most famous pre-Columbian quad-crosses seem to be the ones at the Classic Maya site of Palenque, Chiapas, at the Cross Group, mentioned in chapter 2, and on Lord Pakal's sarcophagus lid.[38] The cross icon, in association with ancestors and communicating objects, was central to pre-Columbian Maya cosmology[39] as well as general Mesoamerican[40] and Andean world views.[41] Both the Maya and Roman Catholic cross symbols are multivocalic, and my interpretations focus on patterns amongst the most prevalent contextual themes. The core patterns of both crosses are determined through world-view conventions that promote their continuity, albeit transformed, throughout the centuries. I am not here proposing a diffusion from the ancient Middle East to the New World; there is no evidence whatsoever for such claims or that of other mysterious, ancient, Old World diffusions.[42] Through iconographic research focusing on Old and New World parallel cross origins and adoption of form, as focusing on cross developmental changes and iconic overlap, it is evident that these two iconic forms of the cross and associated attributes arose independently of each other. The two iconic forms of the cross, that is, Christian and Maya, have meanings beyond the readily visible object that can only be discerned through a rigorous iconological analysis.

In discussing the hybrid quality of contemporary Maya cosmologies and the Mesoamerican quad motif, the Bedouin background of Israel as it came into contact with Canaan, cannot be ignored.[43] The Roman Catholic adaptations of Islamic religion during the colonial Moorish period in the Iberian peninsula

cannot be overlooked either.[44] The history of the Christian cross is no different from the syncretic evolution of other symbols, and the following demonstrates that this icon already had an ancient transformational heritage[45] long before reaching the Iberian peninsula or the American continents. In order to cast light upon and better comprehend the significance of the Maya communicating cross, I shall first analyze and contextualize its Roman Catholic counterpart. In doing so, I will follow two of Victor Turner's examples. The first will be his placing of as much emphasis on ritual process and native understandings as possible.[46] The second will be his view that societies are composed of individuals who are constantly engaged in a symbolic field of action composed of drama and metaphor based on historic memories of images and experiential phenomena and learned through generations of past experience and relations.[47]

The Cross, the Crucifix, the Tree of Life, and the Tree of Knowledge

The tree of knowledge, the tree of life, and the Christian cross and the Roman Catholic crucifix are three, debatably four, distinguishable icons that are often, though erroneously, treated as one and the same. The cross was an ancient instrument that, as a tool for imposing the death sentence, was used exclusively for the purpose of execution. Although the cross tool underwent many structural changes throughout its history, the mode of its implementation did not vary much.[48] Execution through crucifixion on the cross is thought to have originated in Persia whence it spread to Greece and eventually to Rome.[49] The Hebrew Bible, reshuffled and renamed the Old Testament in the Christian Bible, significantly does not note crucifixions. When mentioned in the New Testament, the practice of crucifixion is exclusively linked to the Romans, who reserved the authority to impose and implement this sentence.[50]

The New Testament mentions that Jesus of Galilee was crucified for the supposed crime of high treason against the Roman state.[51] Though Jesus spoke a message of redemption and salvation through spiritual enlightenment and tolerance, some of his followers regarded Christ as the Messiah who was prophesied to set Israel free from Roman oppression. Upon the execution of Jesus, the symbolism of the cross and the image of the crucifix, that of Christ impaled, suffering, and dying on the cross, begin to shift through the agency and practice of the Messiah's followers, though most of the crucial transformation is attributed to Paul the Apostle.[52] Paul, also known as Saul the Pharisee, never physically

met Christ, as his birth is estimated to be within a couple of decades after the death of Jesus.[53] Paul converts upon seeing a vision of the resurrected Messiah and henceforth becomes a fervent proselytizer of his new faith.[54] Paul's interpretation of his vision, distilled through his background of hermetic Hellenistic cosmology, Jewish Messianic prophecy, and apocalyptic thought, eventually became core tenets within Christian symbolism.[55]

The Son of Man, as Jesus reportedly referred to himself,[56] was executed in one of the vilest and most degrading manners possible. To defuse the stigma associated with Jesus's execution as a criminal, Paul's theology evolves into the saving action of God through the ultimate sacrifice of Christ the Son. The crucifix thus becomes the symbol of salvation through the absolution of sin through the death of Jesus.[57] During this time the crucifix begins to symbolize self-renunciation,[58] comfort to the oppressed, and to serve as a behavioral model.[59] The crucifix is also interpreted to symbolize a new life of grace through participation in the ritual of baptismal purification.[60] The above elements of signification associated with the Christian cross are anchors of related sacred meanings that have remained central to its message of redemption and salvation for two millennia.[61] The extent to which these meanings can be applied to Maya crosses, however, will be debated below. As will be demonstrated, aside from the occasional presence of a crucifix in village Roman Catholic churches, my Maya consultants often use crosses in a different indexical manner and in non-Catholic ritual settings where their signification has little to do with actual Christian practice (fig. 4.1).

The tree of knowledge, like the cross and crucifix, also has an extensive historical heritage. In the Bible the tree of knowledge indexes the knowledge of good and evil[62] and arrogance;[63] however, as a tree of life the symbol is not a central theme for it only appears in vague reference as being somewhere in the midst of Eden[64] and later reappears only in metaphor.[65] To Jews, in contrast to Christians, the tree of life is omnipresent in the semibotanical form of the nine- or seven-branched menorah. Trees were symbolic in the Middle East for their ability to maintain green foliage throughout summers and droughts[66] and for their strength.[67] Tree symbolism is conspicuously scarce in the biblical canon because trees were central icons in ancient Israeli and Canaanite rituals that, much like Celtic religion, focused on nature and were later considered pagan referents.[68] While some similarities exist between trees in the Christian Bible and Maya crosses, their function and indexical meanings are not the same. Regarding trees and their importance to the cross, for example, large branches

were sometimes quickly put together to create a crucifix but only to expedite the execution of a criminal.[69] The most significant biblical similarity to a Maya cross appears only twice, where the tree of knowledge is said to be in the middle of Eden where four rivers divide the garden into quadrants.[70] Maya peoples tend to conceptualize their world as being quadripartitioned and centered on trees of abundance that give them sense of place. In a striking cultural conceptual difference, the Judeo-Christian God explicitly orders Adam and Eve to distance themselves from the tree at the center of their world.[71]

Maya and Roman Catholic Christian cultural logics, while superficially resembling one another in terms of the material image of the cross, differ in practice and meaning. For example, the Spaniards brought Iberian crosses to the New World that displayed iconographic continuities from the Byzantine period. These crosses were sometimes painted or adorned with carbuncles, usually jewel or flower motifs, at the end staffs of each cross and at its center (fig. 4.2). These Christian motifs signify Jesus's wounds while languishing and suffering on the cross.[72] Christ was not roped to his cross in the usual Roman execution practice but instead was nailed through his wrists and feet onto the wood. Christ's head wound was inflicted by forcing him to wear a crown of thorns, while a Roman soldier inflicted the central wound on his chest. Red jewels, such as rubies, are ready

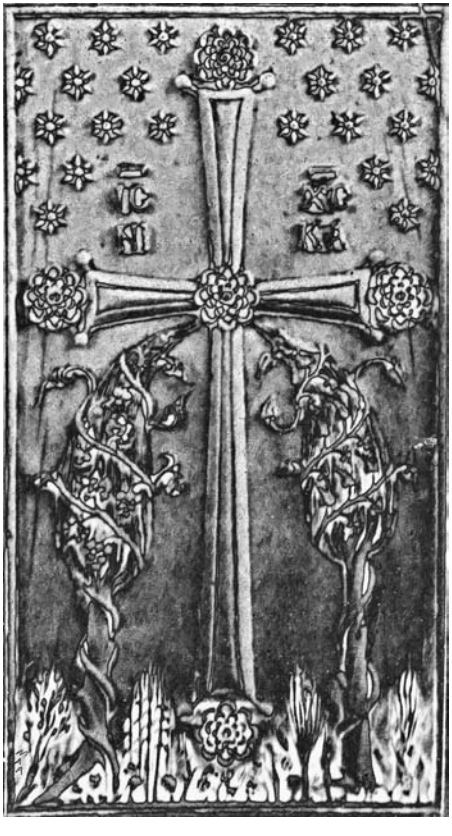


figure 4.2:
Byzantine Period
Christian Cross.
ART GENERATED BY THE AUTHOR AFTER BECKWITH (1961:79).

signifiers for blood, but the symbolism of the flowers in this five-point cross context is not so easily ascertained. Maya crosses, ancient as well as modern, sometimes depict flowers in almost the identical places as the Christian ones but for different reasons.

Flower motifs on contemporary Maya crosses are much more evident in the highlands than in the Yucatán lowlands. When *loolo'ob*, flowers do happen to be represented on Maya crosses, my consultants often associate them with their *uchben* Maya, their ancient ancestors, who they say nourished themselves by smelling sweet flowers much like *ts'unu'uno'ob*, hummingbirds, appear to do. The fragrance of flowers according to some of my Maya consultants is much like food; they say this essence is what bees convert into honey. Flowers on contemporary Maya crosses may stem from both European and Mesoamerican origin,

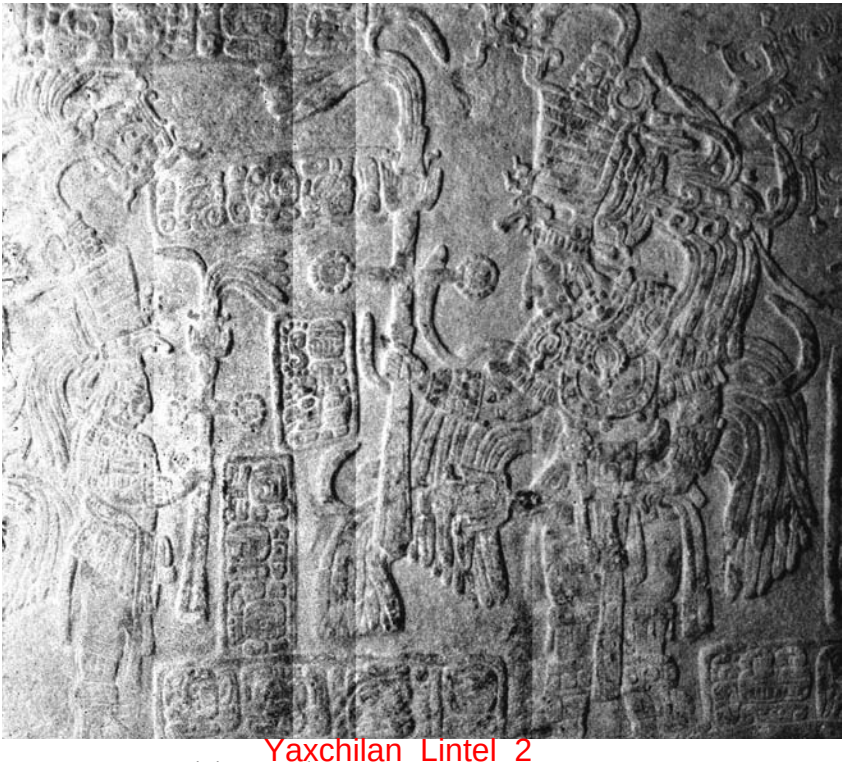


figure 4.3: Yaxchilán Lintel 2.
PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR.



figure 4.4:
Koba Panel 4.
PHOTOGRAPH
BY THE AUTHOR.

but Maya crosses typically have only three or at most four flowers, one at each arm and another at the top, instead of the five that represent Jesus's wounds. There are many representations of ancient Maya cruciform objects with flower motifs, for example, the staff quad-crosses at Classic Yaxchilán Lintels 2 (fig. 4.3) and 5[73] and at Kobá's Panel 4 (fig. 4.4),[74] as well as on the previously mentioned Tepeu (fig. 2.16) and Buenavista (fig. 2.17) vases.[75]

Schele associated flowers on Maya crosses with the giant ceiba tree and souls of the deceased.[76] Taube, however, has demonstrated how extensive flower symbolism was in the Americas before European contact, and these motifs are not ceiba specific.[77] Quad-cross and flower motifs are often interlinked in ancient Maya imagery, and this is sometimes shown on cups that perhaps held flower associated beverages (fig. 4.5). The interlinking of quad-cross motifs with flowers has enjoyed a remarkably long continuity amongst Maya ritual practitioners in the Yucatán. My *j'meeno'ob* consultants who keep native *xunan kaab*, stingless bees, for medicinal and ritual honey tend to stamp or paint crosses, some in the shape of quad-flowers, onto the log-hives where they keep this particular type of bees (fig. 4.6).

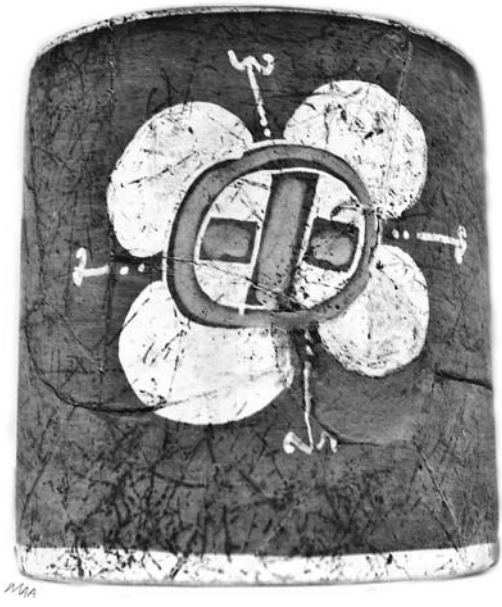


figure 4.5:
Maya Cross-in-Circle and Quad-Flower Vessel.
ART GENERATED BY THE AUTHOR.

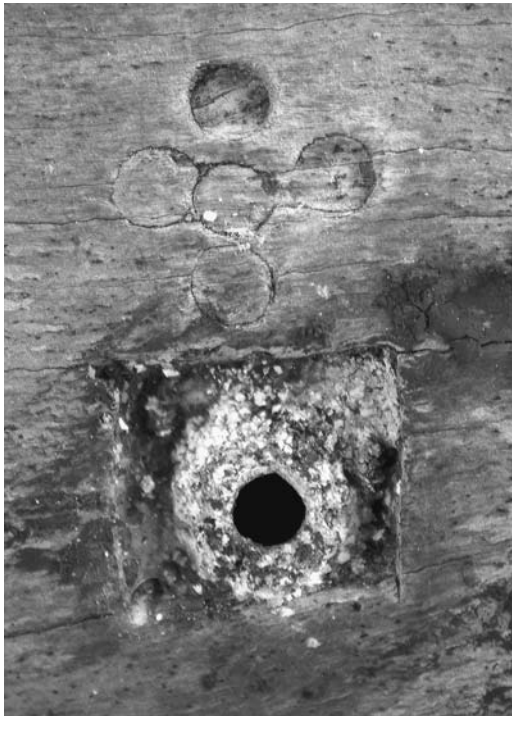


figure 4.6:
Maya Stingless Bee Log-Hive Quad-Flower.
PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR.

Quite astonishing is that the patron entity for these bees during the Postclassic was a being named Ah Muzenkaab, usually depicted in diving pose, who is not only associated with quad-cross motifs but is also noted to carry honeybee logs at his sides (fig. 4.7). The log-hives carried by Ah Muzenkaab are identical to those my Maya j'meeno'ob consultants keep numbered in blue-green hues (fig. 4.8). My main j'meen consultant places the quad-flower on his log-hives because, according to him, his bees roam the four areas of his field and the many flowers these bees supposedly frequent have four petals. My consultant also has the inside of his log-hives quadripartitioned where these bees maintain their honeycombs. The flowers found on some of the green crosses, he says, reflect the four areas of the *kool* (cornfield), bees, and honey. What my consultant points to here is that the green Maya cross reflects in this instance the well-being of both the bee communities and his village. The connection of these xunan kaab bees to the Maya village at large is no coincidence. Xunan kaab honey is the preferred, although now rare, sweetener that helps ferment the ritual mead-type drink known as *baal-che'* used in many of the j'meen's ritual productions.



figure 4.7:
Maya Ah Muzenkaab Diving Figure with Log-Hives and Quad-Cross.
ART GENERATED BY THE AUTHOR.

These contemporary Maya concepts sharply contrast with Christian notions regarding crosses and their associated iconography. Here I return to the flowers found on Byzantine crosses. The flowers on Christian crosses signify the enlarging, popcornlike bloody wounds of Jesus from his nailing on the crucifix. The ripped bloody wounds from Jesus's weight hanging on the cross, and the preying by insects, is thought to have enlarged the nail holes on his body into seemingly puffy and layered blooming flowers. The flower motifs on Byzantine



figure 4.8: Maya Stingless Bee Log-Hives. PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR.

period crosses were apparently placed there to beautify and transform profane, gory wounds into precious sacred ones; extremely devout Roman Catholics have reportedly manifested supernatural sacred stigmata on their bodies as testament to their love and empathy for Jesus's suffering.[78]

Other flower associations with Christian crosses are present during Holy Week at Easter in association with the coming of spring. In Christianity one finds much influence from Euro-Celtic and Roman traditions. Prominent examples of pagan influence are Christmas trees, Yule logs, holly, garland, colorful lights, gifts placed under evergreens, mistletoe,[79] Easter bunnies, Easter eggs, and Easter lilies. The word "Easter" is nowhere found in biblical scripture and is believed to be derived from the Middle Eastern Ishtar or more likely



figure 4.9: Easter Sunday Christian Cross with Flowers and Draped Holy Linen.
PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR.

from the Celtic Eostre. Both Ishtar and Eostre are female entities associated with regeneration, flowers, trees, and the moon. The annual date of the Easter holiday is linked, timed, and fluctuates according to the differing monthly lunar cycles. Rather than the date of Christ's resurrection, the celebration of Easter is annually set according to the first Sunday following the first full moon after the vernal equinox.[80] For the reasons mentioned above, one can often find spring flowers dressing Christian crosses on Easter Sunday (fig. 4.9).

The signification of flowers on Maya and Christian crosses are not the same. The above delineation of contrasts is not trite, as my j'meeno'ob consultants, or most Maya I deal with, have had little if any schooling and understand little actual Roman Catholic doctrine and dogma. Even if some of my Maya consultants know some Roman Catholic prayers, they typically understand very little of their contextual practice and meaning or have any sort of knowledge regarding their derivation. Sometimes one finds the initials I.N.R.I. written on a small bar placed horizontally on top the vertical staff of Maya crosses. These initial letters stand for the Latin phrase *Iesvs Nazarenvs Rex Ivdaeorvm*, the Latin *I* and *V* being the English *J* and *U* respectively, meaning Jesus the Nazarean: King of the Jews. The phrase is attributed to Pontius Pilate, Roman procurator of Judaea in

AD 26, in sarcastic reference to the Jewish Messiah and was later displayed over Jesus the Nazarene while he hung on the crucifix.[81] Rare must be the Maya individual who understands the meaning of I.N.R.I. Not one of my consultants, not even *maestro cantores* as Maya orators who sing in Roman Catholic churches, have been able to remotely explain to me the significance of I.N.R.I. and why it is sometimes seen on crosses.

When I have asked as to the meaning of I.N.R.I., "*¿Baax u kát u ya le d'ziibo?*" that is, "What is the significance of the letters?" my consultants typically answer that they do not know but would like to, if I can supply the answer. My answer has often been met with perplexed frowns and questions, variants of the following: "*¿S'ooki in wuyik yan Judíos bo'axe miinwoye t'ux ku kactali?*" or "*¿Min woye wa saacwinic maox e Jesús unto nook ja'alach?*," "I have heard of Jews, but where do they live?" and "Are they gringos (whites), and was Jesus (as the white God) one of your presidents?," respectively. The preceding interchanges are often acute during my fieldwork. On many a Christian holiday, the offerings made are often given first to invisible nonhumans that share the Maya's everyday world; however, images of Jesus or the Virgin Mary will not be neglected and sometimes get a shot of cane alcohol or a bottle of beer, along with a portion of food for good measure, so they can join in the festivities.

Cultural Logic, Maya Cosmogony, and the Voice of Communicating Objects

Could the Maya crosses of Yucatán be a relatively new phenomenon if communicating objects were present before the Social War? Or was the Talking Cross put to a conventional but also innovative use, in that it was used to issue political rhetoric to counter the enemy? I very much doubt how new the Talking Cross really was, since other type of talking objects have been noted for much of pre-Columbian Mesoamerica.[82] Both Bricker[83] and Reed[84] concede that the Maya had communicating objects before the Spanish invasion and they tended to hide these from their oppressors. In addition to the Mayas' continual use over centuries of communicating objects similar to the crosses, Jones,[85] as well as Folan, Gunn, and Domínguez Carrasco,[86] and Reed,[87] have suggested that the military hierarchy that was set up to guard the major communicating crosses was a Maya adaptation of their ancient political system.

Contradictory information, which the rebel Maya themselves perhaps propagated through deliberate manipulation, abounds concerning on just how

exactly the crosses communicate. In his study of Maya maestro cantores, Burns has documented that, like mediums of sorts, these Maya orators can "become possessed by the Speaking Cross, . . . [and] this explains one of the difficulties scholars have had in understanding the proliferation of crosses during the Caste War."[88] Reed also states that the Maya rebels "didn't believe that the voice came physically from the Cross, but rather that the words of God were given sound through the medium of a possessed man. This takes us beyond tricks of ventriloquism and acoustics to a genuinely religious idea."[89] Burns's and Reed's independent statements are crucial in comprehending the functional aspects of ancient and contemporary Maya cosmology. The letters, communiqués, whistles, carrying on, and racket attributed to the Talking Cross device as directed toward would-be enemies of the Maya rebels were evidently, if placed in the war context within which these actions took place, mere military tactics. The strategy of attributing a role of military leadership to a Talking Cross has worked all too well even to this day. Many researchers have assumed a priori that the Maya masses, assumed to be gullible, bought in the military tactic of the Talking Cross.

The contemporary Maya do not believe that communicating crosses or any other similar ritual objects physically talk, never mind write or dictate letters. The Talking Cross that had emanating vocal capabilities was a military ploy cast from within a world view that had, and continues to have, objects that communicate through other means. Never have I witnessed, or heard of from my consultants, any practice attributing vocal capabilities to Maya crosses or any of their other communicating devices. Communication with nonhumans through crosses or other objects is not considered extraordinary within my consultants' world view and practice. The delineation of ritual space continues at all the major cross shrines, with the communicating objects kept somewhat separated from the main room. The wall apertures in Maya shrines that delineate the space of the objects and thus restrict access to the inner section, what I once mistakenly interpreted as the upper world, are created both to protect the communicating objects and provide privacy for the medium-interpreter whose *kuch*, his cargo or burden, it is to communicate with and care for these objects.[90] In chapter 3 I noted the Cozumel shrines that had similar two-sectioned structures for the keeping of these types of objects. Chase additionally states that structure 81 at Santa Rita Corozal, Belize, is similar to the Cozumel shrines and concludes that many Late Postclassic sites had structures specifically for the housing of communicating objects.[91] Two-roomed structures for keeping communicating

objects are noted not just for the Maya, as these types of buildings have been dated starting from approximately 100 BC in Oaxaca, Mexico.[92]

Mesoamerican patterns and conventions are crucial in our continuing effort to understand the functional aspects of cosmological practice pertaining to the indigenous Americas. Mesoamerica was not composed of societies living on cultural islands composed of dissimilar world views. Throughout the history of the indigenous Americas, one often finds the quad-cross motif throughout time and space. The quad motif, like the communicating cross, is often found in relation to trees as in the example appearing on Stela 27 from the Late Formative to Early Classic site of Izapa, Chiapas (fig. 4.10). Note that the quad-cross motif on Stela 27 is placed on the tree trunk as a cartouche that is highly reminiscent of the cave opening in the Chalcatzingo example in figure 2.2. The cartouche has an inset

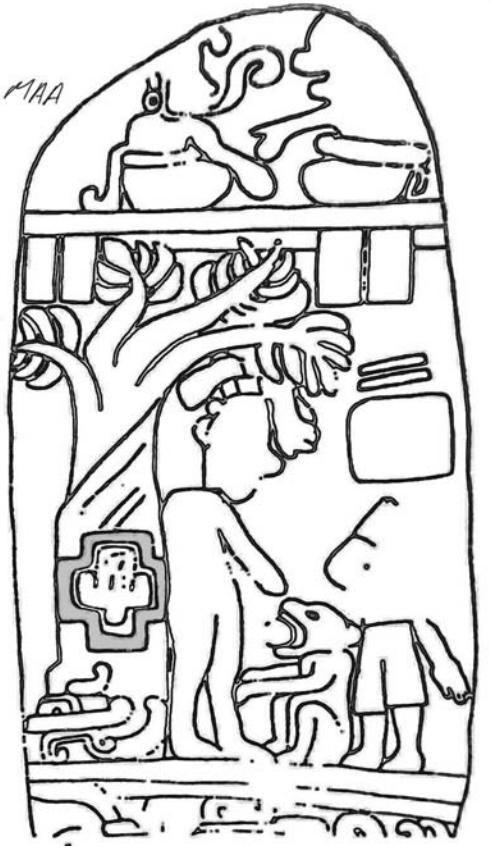


figure 4.10:
Izapa Stela 27.
ART GENERATED BY THE AUTHOR AFTER BEATRIZ BARBA (1990:38).

diving bird, while in the branches of the tree, where birds are typically depicted on this type of tree imagery, are two bundled ancestors shown as if speaking to each other. The image on Stela 27 links the quad-cross motif to the tree and to ancestors. That the ancestors are conceptualized as living and physically taking part in the scene depicted is demonstrated by their lively mannerisms as well as the speech scroll seen emanating from the mouth of one. The quad-associated tree appears to represent an evergreen with its ever-living presence, strength, and might of the ancestors as linked to a sense of home and ecological place. What is represented, in this sense, is that one can communicate with the ancestors through the bundle, tree, and quad-interlinked icons. The ancestors here are not in a separate realm or dimension as our logic would insist. The ancestors are within the earth, on the earth, and in the sky. Trees, it so happens, conveniently interlink all three environmental realms, which are not discrete.

The quad-cross icon has been extremely enduring in conservative indigenous communities in the Americas, and the tree-quad image is omnipresent in many ethnically diverse Maya communities (fig. 4.11). According to Holland, for example, the Tzotzil Maya "keep the ancient Maya belief in the ceiba (tree), which ascending from the center of the earth, penetrates and connects the thirteen levels of the heavens."[93] Some of my Maya consultants in the



figure 4.11: Maya Green Crosses.
PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR.

Yucatán maintain a similar idea. In all the major communicating cross shrines of Noh Kah Xokén Nah, Noh Kah Tixkakal Guardia Nah, Santo Kah Tulum, and Santo Kah Chum Pom, the cross is typically ornamented with an overhead semicircle of flowers similar to those documented in Chiapas.[94] Similarities in meanings of icons documented from Chiapas with my own observations in the Yucatán are striking: semicircles of flowers form an arch that is placed directly overhead each Maya cross, marking them as a central point of reference that helps give these people a sense of place (fig. 4.1). The presence of tree and flower imagery in the shrines is not surprising, since during the Social War the rebels had a sapodilla tree in the middle of their shrine plaza whose *pom*, sap resin, they used as incense.[95] The same pattern of having trees in the middle of the plaza, although with a ceiba, has been described for Calkini, Yucatán,[96] and Potonchán, Tabasco.[97] This is a very ancient pattern, as various other tree species near elite Maya structures have been noted as far back as the Formative.[98]

The previously noted flower arches are found over two types of Maya crosses in the Yucatán Peninsula: the common Latin cross and another form that is more like a small tree trunk with two upward tilted branches (fig. 4.12). Both types of crosses are referred to as *le sàantoo*, Mayanized Spanish for saint. In saying le sàantoo, however, my consultants are referring to an ancestral Maya being or beings, depending on context and circumstance, associated with the cross rather than a Roman Catholic saint or saints. Demonstrating the difference between the two, my consultants tend to refer to their Roman Catholic saints as images or individually as saint this or that, since they state that their representation is of a Roman Catholic god who once lived. Many Maya crosses are painted in variable blue-green hues that signify plants, water, and the sky and are often referred to as *ya'ax che'*, which means green tree. Sosa has elaborated on this very important connection, saying that "in the cross symbol is the meaning of the tree, and the term sàantoh *de c'ˆe'*, 'cross of wood,' refers to these crosses . . . These meanings of tree and wood are actually inseparable in Maya, since the word *c'ˆe'* is used for both . . . [To the] Maya the distinction is not necessary."[99] Since crosses are made of wood, it allows them to share the meaning of tree.

Maya crosses are often conceptualized as a living green tree or plant, causing some of my consultants to conceive of their crosses as being *k'uxan*, that is, alive.[100] *Live* here does not mean that these crosses are literally believed to be animate living objects; rather in indigenous Maya thought, the term k'uxan in this context refers to invisible beings with volition and agency that



figure 4.12: Mayan Communicating Cross with Upward Tilted Branches. PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR.

are associated with these or other communicating objects. The various indexical facets of the Mesoamerican quad-cross gives it a polysemic quality that has allowed the Maya peoples from the colonial period to the present to keep using what now appears to be a Roman Catholic Christian icon for their own purposes. My objective here is not to contradict the obvious and irrefutable evidence of the extensive Roman Catholic spiritual impact on the indigenes of Mesoamerica. What I propose is to better comprehend what made the Iberian invasion of the Americas more accessible than it should have been. The Spanish Roman Catholic conquistadores constantly carried cross icons on their staffs and banners, and their association with this image could not have been lost on the indigenous Americans.

The individual cultural agency of colonial-period Native Americans is usually little acknowledged, while the spiritual conquest of the colonizers is often reified as if total and accomplished by imperial and Roman Catholic fiat. The

transformations and adaptations of the cross during and after the colonial period are readily visible in the ethnohistoric and ethnographic record of the Americas. Colonial-period Maya villagers sometimes placed at their community entrances, for example, crosses as if guardians. This practice is sometimes still visible in contemporary communities where these cross objects, usually four in total, are placed one each at *ukan tu'uk'*, or intercardinal, corners of the village that is being guarded. Sosa, in referencing these village guardians, has stated that it is customary for the Maya to

> pick a small pebble, touch it to their shoe, and place it on the stone slab altar at the foot of the *sàantoh de c'ˆe'* . . . These crosses are [in] the position of *yum báalam*, the guardian deity . . . described as resting at this location . . . Although the current term for jaguar is *cak m'ool*, or red paw, it is rather common mestizo knowledge today that the few Yucatec jaguars that remain, habitually rest in the large, shady *ya' as ce*.'[101]

Landa, in addition, stated that the Maya of his time period used to associate certain nonhuman entities with piles of stones placed at the four entrances into their towns and villages.[102] These colonial-period stones, along with the wooden idols placed on top of them, have now been replaced in modern day by wooden crosses that echo the ancient statues and stones.[103] Stones and crosses, as will be demonstrated in chapter 5, are very much interlinked in indigenous Maya conceptions of their world.

Communicating Objects Are Not Apparitions

During the sixteenth-century colonial period of the Americas, the Spanish friars brought to the New World their belief in supernatural apparitions of the Virgin Mary.[104] Roman Catholic supernatural hierophanies, however, are only pertinent to my analysis as a point of contrast, since my focus concerns indigenous Mesoamerican communicating objects and not supernatural appearances of Roman Catholic saints or the Holy Mother. The Spaniards, as previously mentioned for Landa, for example,[105] noted the Maya use of communicating objects in the pre-Columbian contact era. The proliferation and context of the vessels shown in the previous chapters, as well as the images showing rituals alongside quad-tree crosses (figs. 2.12 and 2.13), indicate that these objects and icons were used to communicate with invisible noncorporeal beings.[106]

Little has apparently changed concerning the function of these communicating objects, although some of the context for them has been transformed under Roman Catholic influence. Case in point is a consultant I initially met through Nancy Forand in a Quintana Roo village. This Maya woman has a *chan oratorio*, a small oratory hut, which looks like a small pole-and-thatch hut. Within this hut the woman and her sons keep three green, floriated crosses (fig. 4.13). The woman says these crosses began to communicate with her husband when he would work his kool, that is, cornfield. In response to their communications, the man sought them out in the field and took them home. Later, in response to further communications and requests, he built for the cross-objects the hut

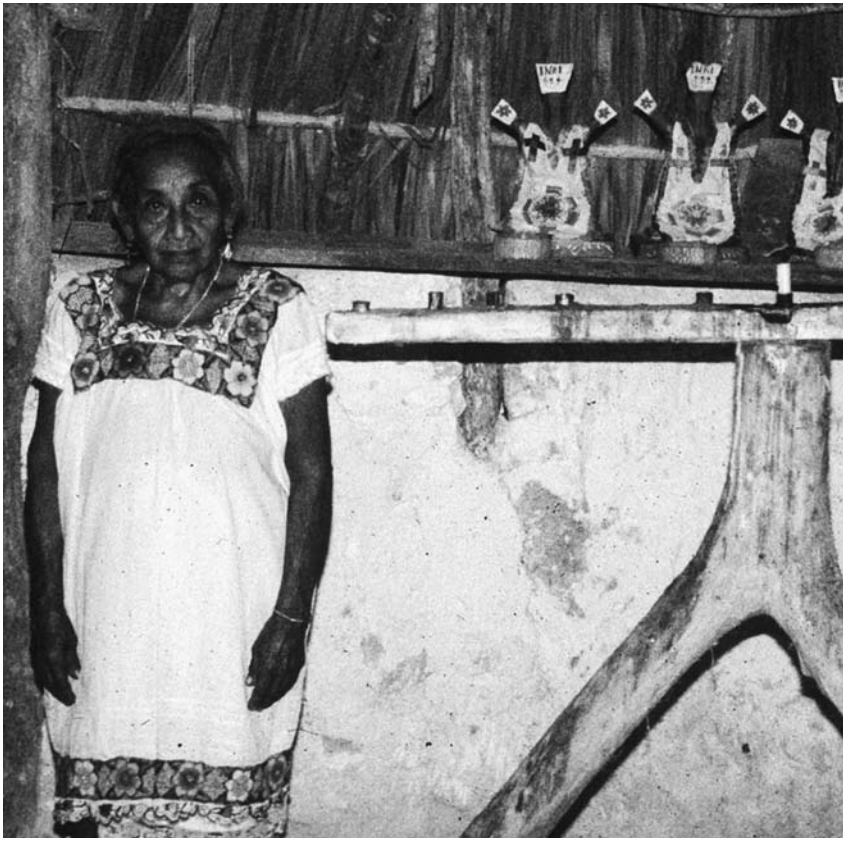


figure 4.13: Mayan Green Communicating Crosses.
PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR.

in which the woman now shelters them. These green crosses, like other Mayan communicating objects, are cared for and maintained as if they were persons. The woman and her sons claim that the cross-objects never physically spoke to the husband but that their communications were transmitted within his dreams. After the death of the husband, the cross-objects began to communicate with the widow and their sons. This case, as is the same with my other consultants with similar experiences, is not considered rare, supernatural, or sacred as it would in our understanding of such apparent mystical phenomena. Such occurrences in the Maya world view are seen as common and not out of the ordinary.

Crosses like those mentioned above, actually branches taken from trees, are not rare amongst the Maya. Many of my Maya consultants have minishrines within their compounds that shelter similar communicating objects. The number of Maya villages that have these types of domestic minishrines within family compounds is unknown, but the number of shrines and communicating objects is much more extensive than previously recognized. There has been more than an implied assumption that the communicating crosses are ranked hierarchically, but such notions miss the point.[107] What may appear hierarchical simply indicates a horizontal playing field with the crosses having powers, knowledge, and abilities that vary, just as skills vary amongst individual humans. Relations here vary and are differentiated in their social debt and merit-based reciprocal nature of interaction—be this interaction amongst crosses or between crosses and other objects, plants, animals, or humans. Furthermore, it is within these social relations that particular qualities and skills pertaining to human and nonhuman persons are developed, acquired, and known to one another.

Nonhuman persons are best understood as indigenous cultural composites of multiple invisible beings, some named and some not, that communicate through various objects. Each major shrine with a communicating device, even though each of these objects has virtually the same function, has a particular importance amongst the Maya, who know and interact with them. The differential value of the communicating devices is in part the result of their location, as these villages or their regions are often linked to historically important cultural geographies. Demonstrating the importance and deep significance that sense of place has for the Maya is the cosmological conception given to some of the shrines that shelter these communicating objects. Some of these shrines are considered alive in their own right and have nonhuman entities associated with the structure proper as well as the objects sheltered within it. To index this

symbiotic relationship, these structures are sometimes painted either a blue-green color, like the crosses, or a skinlike, red-pink to red-brown hue.

Some Maya green crosses have key icons of maize on their staffs that are typically obscured underneath a cloth. The maize imagery in combination with the green color of the cross creates an indexical link to plant life and agriculture. Maya crosses are often linked to reciprocity and are thus used in rain rituals linked to agricultural practice.[108] One of these rituals is the reciprocal petition and thanksgiving for rain variably called the Cha Chaak or the Maaman Chaak. Having been discussed at length elsewhere, as the ritual is extensively practiced throughout the Yucatán Peninsula, I will only comment on what has not been elaborated: the indexical meaning of the green cross in the rain ritual.[109] During the Cha Chaak and other similar rituals where a cruciform object is present, the cross is conspicuously placed toward the recessed center of the makeshift altar, which some of my j'meen consultants say represents the earth's level where their community sits. The quad-cross, being toward the middle of the altar, indexes the center point of the mini-cosmos the j'meen creates. The four legs of the table, along with the arched branches, create the four directional sides. During the ritual, the j'meen evokes, that is, summons, nonhuman persons associated with the cross from their home in the forest, caves, or wherever else they might be. According to my j'meen consultants, the cross object is a secretary-like tool that functions as a communication device between themselves and the Chaako'ob (rain patrons), the Aluxo'ob (forest-dwelling beings), and other non-human entities.

The Chaako'ob do not always present themselves willingly and must be *maach*, grasped, through the verbal manipulation of the j'meen. My consultants do not worship these beings but have a personal relationship with them that varies in mood and temperament. The j'meen summons the rain patrons from the east side of his altar and guides them down *pool yáax*, diving headfirst, through the *jool*, aperture, of the arched vault made from tree branches. The Dresden Codex, curiously, depicts a diving foliated Chaak figure holding a ceramic vessel from which emerges a tritipped plant emerging from a pot. Note that Maya green crosses are tritipped.[110] The j'meeno'ob are able to see what these invisible nonhumans are doing by gazing through their *saastun*, quartz peering glass, and thus gauge what tone and speech to use in requesting the presence and favors of these forest beings. Depending on the actions of the entities in question, my Maya consultants may begin a transition from soft and sweet words to a louder and terser performance that sometimes alternates between the two.

Interestingly, but not surprisingly, a similar manner of addressing nonhumans is practiced by the O'odham, the so-called Pima-Papago, of the Southwest.[111] Also similar, further exhibiting a pan-American indigenous world view, is the O'odham use of a divining-like quartz, used for both curing and corn and rain rituals as also found throughout many indigenous societies in the greater Southwest[112] and Southeast.[113]

The Bundling of Communicating Objects

Another key signifier linking Maya crosses to agricultural regeneration is the cloth with which such objects are typically dressed. The cloth on Maya crosses has been affirmed to be a miniature huipil, the contemporary traditional Maya woman's dress, and the gender of the cross has therefore been assumed to be female.[114] I very much disagree. Utilizing Victor Turner's "inside view" approach, that is, closely following native exegesis in interpreting their own symbols, leads me to a radically different conclusion.[115] The Castilian Spanish words for the cross, *la cruz*, have the feminine marker of "la," but, the Maya, following their native linguistic and grammatical structure, do not literally adhere to Spanish gender markers for objects. The Mayan languages do not have gender markers for objects in the same manner as the Spanish language. My consultants tend to refer to their crosses by male names and have been perplexed that I should have considered them female. None of the crosses I have yet to document has ever been described as being in any way, shape, or form female. Although Maya crosses are not considered female, however, they are often associated with a subtle, yet strong, feminine attribute that is ironically represented by the assumed huipil.

The covering on the cross is not a huipil-dress but a different sort of clothing.[116] In Spanish this cloth is called a *sudario*, a shroud, made from *sujuy nook'*, new cloth, that is used as a *piix*, bundle, to cover the cross. The sudario cloth is usually simply referred to as *nook'*, that is, clothing, used for shrouding the crosses in a *u piix kruz*, cross sheath. This cloth is then used to *piix le kruzo'ob*, that is, cover, sheath, or bundle the crosses. The huipil and sudario are two distinct but somewhat superficially similar-looking items.[117] Yucatecan huipil dresses have a straight-edged U-shaped collar (fig. 4.13 / woman) and are highly adorned, while the nook'-sudarios have a triangular, V-shaped, cleft collar (fig. 4.13 / crosses) and typically have less or no embroidery. The distinction between the huipil dress and the cloth on the crosses differs not only in appearance and function but in significance and concept as well.

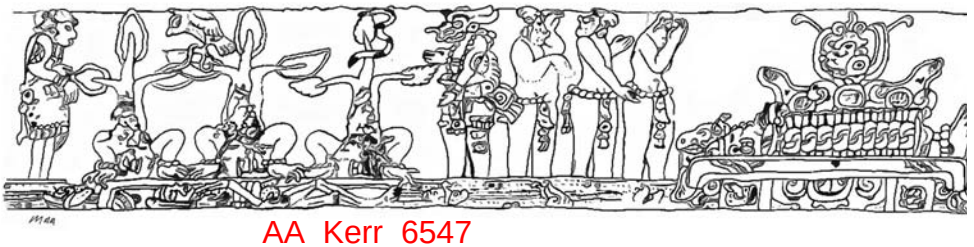
My Maya consultants do not take the differences between a *piix-nook'*, bundling cloth, for the crosses and the huipil woman's dress lightly. Every wrapped Maya cross I have studied has worn *piix-sudarios*, sometimes having from one to three layers. I have, however, witnessed several important exceptions that need to be mentioned. I have seen crosses wearing huipil dresses, but these have not been in Maya villages. The crosses I have seen wearing huipil have been in museum exhibits. Museum curators probably exhibit Maya crosses clothed in huipil dresses because most researchers writing on the subject claim that this is the garment the traditional Maya use to dress their crosses. Seemingly contradictory, although not in indigenous Maya concepts, the piix-nook' death sheath signifies that the cross object is at once both dead and living.[118] One of my j'meen'oob consultants has pointed to their milpa cornfield and stated that like corn "*le kruzo ku nojoch ta te tu sudario yetel te luma*"—"the cross grows from within the shroud and the earth."

The piix shroud covering and their cleft aperture is an important nexus that links crosses that wear it to the agricultural cycle, and other ecological processes, by reflecting the constant life and death of organic regeneration. Maya green crosses index corn plants and vice versa. The trees, maize, and other botanical life linked to crosses, and spoken of and treated as if personal beings, are said to have been given birth by the earth. That such connections should be so in Maya thought need not surprise since the Mayan word *pixan*, apparently from the root of piix, as sheath, has often been glossed into the Christian concept of spirit or soul. Piix, however, is better understood as representing bound and fixed personhood that makes humans or other things and objects k'uxan, that is, alive. The pixan is what becomes untethered from the body of a human, or other thing or object, at death. If the pixan strays too long or leaves the body vessel permanently, it renders that object devoid of volition and personhood, that is, lifeless. The human body, in this sense, is no different from other sorts of material objects. A person within my Maya consultants' world view is simply an object that has sentient agency tethered to it. Persons can be and are attached to things other than human. My j'meen consultants can, if they know how, communicate with cross persons, tree persons, plant persons, animal persons, rock persons, and so on down the line. These persons, as linked to regeneration, are very different from the animism that is often attributed to the Maya and many Native Americans. My Maya consultants see the regeneration of plants and persons as occurring through clefts in the earth, and as noted above, the Maya cross emerges from its cloth's V-shaped cleft.

Clefts, in connoting the female sex of the earth, index regeneration in pre-Columbian imagery. There is a similar indexical function of the V-shaped cleft from which Maya crosses, conceptualized as trees and maize stalks, protrude and earthen clefts in pre-Columbian cosmological imagery. There is a millennia–long, multidimensional nexus between Maya conceptions of trees, quad-crosses, maize, and rituals focused on regenerative elements. Regeneration is a core pre-Columbian concept that can be traced through ancient Maya imagery. Taube, for example, identifies "maize-god" representations in various pre-Columbian regenerative contexts as linked to corn agriculture and sometimes wearing quad-crosses while germinating crosslike from a cleft (fig. 4.14).[119] Another pertinent image that adds to this discussion simultaneously depicts the maize god, as a skeleton dressed in a nine-knot death shroud, germinating into three cruciform cacao-plant persons (fig. 4.15).[120] Contemporary Maya crosses are often linked to regeneration, as are ancient quad-cross motifs. Modern Maya crosses are sometimes used, especially those very knowledgeable j'meeno'ob employ, as devices to communicate with invisible nonhuman beings in a manner similar to other communicating objects within Mesoamerican indigenous communities. My consultants



figure 4.14: Maize Patron Emerging Crosslike from a Cleft.
ART GENERATED BY THE AUTHOR AFTER SELER (1902–1923:29).



AA Kerr 6547

figure 4.15: Funerary Bundle with Three Quad-Cross Cacao Plants. ART GENERATED BY THE AUTHOR AFTER SCHELE AND MATHEWS (1998:122 FIG. 3.27).

tend not to identify their crosses or triadic cross groupings with calvary, the hilltop where Christ was crucified, crucifixes, or the suffering Christ.[121]

From the colonial period to the present, according to Reed, there has been a proliferation of speaking objects, such as corn, ceramics, and wooden chests, that "speak in a whisper too low for white ears."[122] These whispers are in fact unspoken means of communication. Material objects are the foci by which Mesoamerican ritual specialists concentrate their actions while communicating with nonhumans. The quad-cross icon is but a visible image that reflects such actions, and its signification extends back into at least the Preclassic period of Mesoamerica. The legacy of this pre-Columbian imagery is best exemplified within the context of the contemporary communicating crosses in the forest villages of the Quintana Roo Maya.

It is unclear how many Maya villages with shrines currently shelter communicating crosses, although they are clearly too numerous to be ascertained. Also uncertain is the number of crosses that initially appeared at Noh Ka'ah Santa Kruz X-Balam Nàah Kampok'olche Kàaj, the village commonly referred to in the historical literature as Chan Santa Kruz.[123] Some historians state that one cross appeared, while others claim there were three.[124] The confusion surrounding the number of crosses and their sanctuaries is the result of the general inaccessibility of these shrines to outsiders: non-Mayas are not easily accepted in these communities, and a rotating guard often protects their shrines. As my Maya guard friends say in their vague, roundabout answers to what they consider outsiders' pesky questions, "*leetio'ob cheen naatbil u metico'ob*," that is, "The best maneuver we can make is to keep them guessing." The defense mechanism of a rotating guard for the crosses is set in place for very good reasons and is thought to have begun when the Noh Ka'ah X-Balam Nàah shrine was initially

established.[125] There is, however, extensive documentation that pre-Columbian Mesoamericans also guarded their communicating devices.

Communicating objects often represent ancestors, sometimes in the form of funerary bundles, apparently in order to facilitate lineage identification.[126] More than likely, ancient rulers visited, and a priest or priests who stayed close at hand cared for, these bundles and other such objects. Such practices can still be readily seen in today's guarding of communicating crosses at the major shrines. Villa Rojas, for example, documented that the cross guard was headed by the Nohoch Tata, Great Father, who maintained his living quarters next to the shrine.[127] Also close to the shrine were barracks for the guard, which was composed of villagers engaged in rotational service to the shrine. Not much has changed since Villa Rojas's time regarding the guard, but the available pool for guards is shrinking because of evangelical Christian conversion and the increasing migrant wage work young males at tourist locations along the Caribbean coast are now doing.

While much emphasis has been placed on the Tixkakal Guardia shrine and its Nohoch Tata, Capitán (Captain), and General, the other shrines are just as important. A major communicating shrine that has been overshadowed by Tixkakal in the literature, although certainly not by the Maya, is the one at Noh Ka'ah Xokén Chuumuk Lu'um. This shrine holds the key connection between the pre-Columbian quad to the colonial and contemporary crosses. It shelters a monolithic cross whose Social War-period caretaker and medium proclaimed himself as Juan de la Kruz of Xokén, in similar fashion to Juan de la Kruz of Cobá, Juan de la Kruz of Chichén, Juan de la Kruz of Mani, Juan de la Kruz of Cenil, and Juan de la Kruz of Balam Na.[128] Of all the communicating crosses related to the Social War of Yucatán, the oldest appears to be the one at Chuumuk Lu'um.[129] The cross at this center is not composed of wood but of an approximately five-foot-tall monolith (fig. 4.1). The Chuumuk Lu'um cross, which I believe to be a recycled and altered pre-Columbian stela, is the focus of annual agricultural festivities that villagers from throughout the Quintana Roo and Yucatán states attend.[130] The Maya consider this monolith and communicating objects in general to be moody and temperamental, as humans are sometimes prone to be, and not always benevolent.[131] The cosmovision behind the Mayan communicating crosses is ancient and linked to the stone stela cross at Chuumuk Lu'um.[132] The reuse of ancient monoliths by prehistoric, colonial, and contemporary indigenous peoples in various parts of the world is sometimes the focus of pilgrimage and ritual, and it is to the Maya stela monolith of Chuumuk Lu'um I turn next.[133]



figure 5.1: Pigs Thrown onto Raised Round Stone.
PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR.

CHAPTER 5

Pigs for the Sun and a Mayan Communicating Stela

Future investigations will thoroughly confirm that the Indian does not make the separation into personal as contrasted with impersonal, corporeal with impersonal, in our sense at all. What he seems to be interested in is the question of existence, of reality; and everything that is perceived by the senses, thought of, felt and dreamt of, exists.

—PAUL RADIN,
"Religion of the North American Indians"

What is called "sacrifice" in English or Spanish, then, simply means the "spreading out of an offering" in Nahuatl. The spreading itself is the same kind of action that arranges and orders the five suns of the cosmos.

—KAY A. READ,
Time and Sacrifice in the Aztec Cosmos

Even the manner in which the numerous pigs are killed for the preparation of the daily distribution of free food exhibits a replication of the symbol of the cross. The squealing animal is thrown on its back, its four legs are firmly

grasped by four individuals at the four corners while the fifth plunges the knife into its heart.

—HERMAN W. KONRAD,
"Pilgrimage as Cyclical Process: The Unending Pilgrimage
of the Holy Cross of the Quintana Roo Maya"

Mesoamerican Crosses and the Day of the Holy Cross

IN THE LAST CHAPTER I BRIEFLY DISCUSSED THE CONTINUITY of Byzantine art as it influenced much Iberian Roman Catholic imagery.[1] A great deal of this imagery concerns the three crosses linked to the mount of Golgotha,[2] known as Calvary,[3] that is easily observable in Spanish colonial art. Because of Spanish Roman Catholic influence, commemorating the Day of the Holy Cross is widespread throughout much of Latin America. The significance placed upon this icon, however, by those who celebrate its day of dedication is not clear. The very celebration of the holy cross within official Roman Catholic doctrine has been mixed and not without controversy. The true cross icon is historically attributed to the discovery of Christ's crucifix, transformed and now miraculous and healing, by Saint Helena, mother of Constantine.[4] Helena's supposed finding of Christ's crucifix and its ensuing associated miracles are what initiated the Byzantine era practice of venerating the true holy cross.[5] In AD 614, the date of September 14 in AD 326 was set within the Roman Catholic liturgical calendar for this celebration and commemoration, known as the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross, regarding the discovery of the true holy cross.[6]

Despite September 14 being the date assigned to venerating Vera Cruz, the True Cross, not all of Christendom has been convinced of the discovery's authenticity. Regardless of the controversy, according to Seymour, it was "the opinion of the Church that the pious search of St. Helena should at least be commemorated and is shown by the appointment of the Festival of the Invention of the Cross (May 3rd) by the Greek, Roman, and Anglican branches."[7] Ironically, it is on May 3, the date commemorating the recognition of the miraculous true cross, that is celebrated throughout Mesoamerica and not September 14, as initially installed as the day of its discovery. Included with those who celebrate the day of the cross on May 3 are the Maya, who on this date make large offerings to some of their crosses in anticipation of the rainy season.[8] For the Maya of San Juan de Chamula, Chiapas, the Day of the Holy Cross on May 3 is one of

only two Roman Catholic festivals celebrated in homes, fields, water holes, and cemeteries and not at church.[9]

For the Chamula Maya, like the Maya in the Yucatán, the reason for their emphasis on the cross is linked to agriculture, cultural-historical geography, and ancestors.[10] Blom, Girard, Guiteras-Holmes, Holland, and Vogt have extensively documented similar pan-Maya exegesis regarding the indigenous cruciform object and its links to the ecology and ancestors.[11] The indexical meanings of the indigenous Mesoamerica quad-cross and the Roman Catholic holy true cross are strikingly distinct. The Native American-wide quad-cross image indexes the sun and its path, quadripartitioned weather phenomena in anticipation of the coming rainy season, geographical sense of place as linked to ecological markers, and reciprocal relations with ancestral nonhumans.[12]

Ancient Maya Stelae and Communicating Crosses

During the Maya Postclassic, the site of Xokén was a Kupul-lineage village clustered around the preeminent, politically dominant town of Sakíwal, now known as Valladolid, Yucatán, in the region between Chichén Itzá and Kobá.[13] Today's villagers, demonstrating the important historical sway Sakíwal had in the region, continue to refer to this town by Sakí rather than its colonial name of Valladolid. Sakíwal, whose pyramids are no longer present because they were razed during the conquest, drew tribute from its surrounding villages, of which Xokén and its neighboring Chichimilá and Kanxoc were some of the most important.[14] Today, the two villages of Chichimilá and Kanxoc are two of the most important communities that rotate the festival's kuch-burden to Xokén's stela-cross.[15] Roys states that the villages mentioned above, along with Sakíwal, were tributaries to Chichén Itzá and perhaps later to Mayapán.[16]

There is some evidence that an ancient or colonial *sak b'eh*, raised, white causeway, runs behind the stela-cross shrine. This causeway appears to have linked Chichimilá, Xokén, and Kanxoc to each other and perhaps further on to the Postclassic Yaxuná-Kobá great causeway. It was notably reported that the colonial Maya placed crosses on large stone mounds along such ancient causeways.[17] In correlation, some of my consultants tend to leave pebbles at the base of ancient stelae in the forest as they do for some of their crosses;[18] furthermore, they will sometimes place broken stelae on altars and make offerings to them (fig. 5.2). Stelae and crosses are very much interlinked, according to some of my



figure 5.2: Broken Stela on Altar. PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR.

consultants' points of view; the monolith at the Chuumuk Lu'um shrine has been hacked into a rough crosslike shape for this reason. Villa Rojas mentions in his archaeological and ethnographic work along the Yaxuná-Kobá causeway that Maya villagers may have carted off some of the ancient monoliths for their own use.[19] The village of Paraíso, although in western Yucatán, has a Roman Catholic church with four Pre-Columbian stelae set into its outer walls (fig. 5.3). Don Pablo Tuz Kauil, the sacristan from Paraíso, mentioned to me that when he was a child, the village elders would communicate with these ancient statues. These statues, the stelae, he says, now just whistle from time to time as the knowledge and skills of being able to speak to them are being lost to modernity.[20] Pre-Columbian stelae, just like the indigenous crosses, can be Mayan communicating objects.



figure 5.3: Stelae Placed on Colonial Roman Catholic Church.
PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR.

The communicating-cross device has connections to trees and caves just as its pre-Columbian antecedents did, and many Spanish chroniclers documented the widespread presence of pre-Columbian crosses, as mentioned in chapter 4. The communicating cross of Xokén is simply a transformation of pre-Columbian cosmology. The Maya, for this apparent reason, rank their communicating crosses in priority above the Roman Catholic Christian God.[21] Through the colonial period, Maya ceremonies based on ancient commemorations were enacted in the vicinity of Sakí-Valladolid[22] which is a mere eleven kilometers from Xokén and its stone-cross. K'atun ceremonies were known to be seated in 1677 and 1697 at Chable near Felipe Carrillo Puerto, Quintana Roo,[23] Carrillo Puerto being the modern town name given to the old village where the Talking Cross supposedly first appeared in 1850.[24] Burns has noted that *Chilam Balam*-type books, native manuscripts that contain indigenous history and knowledge, are still kept and read in the village of Tixkakal Guardia, Quintana Roo, and this continues to the present day not only at Tixkakal but also at other cross shrines as well.[25] The shrine at Chuumuk Lu'um, center of

the earth, is rumored to have once held a *Chilam Balam*–style book that told the history of the stone-cross.[26] The stela-cross, furthermore, is rumored to have carved writing toward its base, but its attendant priests now purposefully cover this part of the monolith. Edmonson states that k'atun stelae, as memorials to ancestors, had wooden equivalents and that crosses were eventually substituted for the monoliths during the Postclassic in northern Yucatán.[27]

Classic Period erections and unveiling of stelae that depicted rulers seem to have simply been transformed during the Postclassic into stelae k'atun markers associated with the seating of Chilam Balamo'ob, Jaguar Priests, and time keeping. Pre-Columbian stelae are known through glyphic evidence to have been dedicated during tun, yearly, and k'atun, twenty-year, interval endings.[28] As previously noted, date glyphs on pre-Columbian stelae associate their ts'apah, erection or planting, during cycle-ending periods have led to the conclusion that stelae were part of cultic commemoration, dedication, and ritual.[29] The Yum Santísima Kruz Tun, Lord Stone Cross, is the granddaddy, that is, colonial template form, from which stem the Social War and contemporary communicating crosses. This monolith cross, as will be demonstrated throughout this chapter, is the link that joins ancient Maya stelae commemoration and veneration to contemporary communicating-cross cosmology.

Several Mayanists, as mentioned previously, put forward the now generally accepted idea that pre-Columbian stelae were commemorative stones that often depicted rulers as cruciform-like trees.[30] Carved monoliths seem to have been regarded by the ancient Maya as vital actors with personal identities. That stelae were treated differentially depending on context makes sense considering that these objects were considered personal beings. The behavioral environment of the Maya is difficult to define as subjective or objective, the way we tend to perceive ritual as opposed to nonritual action. In Native American world views, inanimate things can, but not always and not typically, be active with personal agency. Hallowell says as much regarding his experience with the Ojibwa when he states, "I once asked an old man: Are all stones we see about us here alive? He reflected a long while and then replied, 'No! But *some* are.'"[31] I had an epiphany similar to Hallowell's. My j'meen consultants only perceive a stone, a wooden cross, a crystal, and so forth as having volition if they know, through direct relationship and communication with that object, that it has agency. Not all Maya material objects are k'uxan (alive). Allow me to reiterate below some points mentioned in chapter 1 in order to better grasp indigenous Mesoamerican thought regarding what we label as animacy.

I previously delineated that the Mayan term of *k'u* is often glossed into our concepts of god, sacred, and holy. Read has implied the same for the Méxica of Central Mexico regarding their concept of *teotl*.[32] The Nahuatl concept of teotl is often distorted into the Judeo-Christian theological concept of god.[33] Both k'u and teotl, however, vaguely refer to something central that has volition and can be associated with good and bad agency or power. Inherent in these indigenous concepts is that depending on context, all things, whether we define them as animate or inanimate, have the potential for agency and communication. Agency here is generated from nonhuman persons, such as ancestors and composite beings that live in the day-to-day behavioral environment of these peoples.

The ancient differential treatment of stelae, structures, and other objects appears to be based on the personal experience the Maya, individually or as a group, had with each object. The potential for a stelae or other inanimate object to have had personal agency and been able to communicate with a human individual is relative to social context. Circumstance and personal relationships can be fixed either by a ritual practitioner or the noncorporeal being associated with a particular object through ritual production; if so, one would expect in the archaeological record to find certain objects to be housed, while other, similar-looking objects would not. This is exactly the case. The custom of housing what I call communicating objects is present throughout pre-Columbian Mesoamerica. The Classic Period site of Xunantunich, Belize, has two structures that are similar to the previously mentioned Postclassic shrines at Cozumel, with one difference: they each hold a stela in their inner chamber (fig. 2.15).

Structures with an erected stela found within them are not exclusive to Xunantunich and can be found at many Maya sites such as Kalakmul for example (fig. 5.4), or, as in the case of Copán, stelae can also be placed within recessed structural niches.[34] Pertinent to my hypothesis, Structure 2 at Kobá had a preserved Late Postclassic mural of the great ancestral priest Itzamná in context with a centrally placed reused stela.[35] Stuart has suggested that the practice of enclosing stelae may be "a sort of architectonic 'bundling' or 'binding.'"[36] The placing of stelae in niches and vaults is apparently connected to ancestor veneration, feeding, and communication. Stelae, in effect, statues, within structures or niched shrines are long–lasting, lineage-based stone bundles of sorts. An example demonstrating similar indexical contexts between stelae and statues would be the personalized stone representation of Bird Jaguar in the central enclosure of Yaxchilán, Chiapas (Structure 33).[37]



figure 5.4: Inner-Chamber Kalakmul Stela.
PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR.

The first known colonial document that mentions a *ciyum santa curus*, a personalized Maya cross, is a land acknowledgment dated June 28, 1814, in the *Titles of Ebtun*. This document concerns ground-plot titles for someone called Juan Balam, or Juan Jaguar, of Ebtun, which is close to Sakí and Xokén.[38] At the first colonial mention of a personalized cross placed over a stone mound the name Juan Balam is also mentioned. While the Mayan word *balam* means jaguar, it is also used as the title for a medium-priest. Bricker has previously questioned who exactly this self-proclaimed Juan de la Kruz was during the Social War of Yucatán. "Was his name assumed by one of the leaders of the Maya movement in order to win support for the Cult of the Talking Cross? Or was it simply a coincidence that someone with this name became the spokesman for the cross?"[39] Despite the coincidence of a Juan de la Kruz associated with the 1885 Kekchi rebellion in Guatemala, no satisfactory answer to Bricker's question has been established.[40] My consultants' oral traditions, I believe, have the answer.

Maya villagers adjacent to Chuumuk Lu'um at various times mention native priests by the names of Yum Juan Balam, Yum Juan de la Kruz, and Yum Juan de la Kruz Verde in association with their stela-cross. Roys coincidentally mentions a Lord Juan Balam, that is, Yum Juan Balam, as being from the noble Lords of Ebtun lineage.[41] The villages of Xokén, Ebtun, Chichimilá, and Kanxoc are all near Sakí, and all are linked to the Social War rebels.[42] This Lord Juan Balam, or someone with a similar title, appears to be the one usually identified as Juan de la Kruz of Xokén in the Social War rebels' communiqués.[43] Juan de la Kruz Verde, Juan of the Green Cross, appears to have been a Balam Jaguar-Priest who communicated with the monolith of Xokén during the war. Some of my consultants refer to a Juan Balam or Juan de la Yáax Kruz, as a *nohoch j'meen*, great priest, who communicated with their *oxtúul kruz tuuno'*, three-person stone-cross, during this war.

The monolith stone-cross (fig. 4.1) is considered three persons because it is highly connected to two other cross-persons now sheltered in the villages of Tulum and Tixkakal Guardia. These three cross-persons are said to be related to each other and continually communicate amongst themselves. The communication among these crosses is said to take place, even though they are quite distant from one another, through the extensive, underground, connected limestone sinkholes called *ts'ono'oto'ob*. For this reason the Social War Talking Cross is sometimes referred to as if three persons.[44] Xokén and Juan de la Kruz are both directly linked to the X-Balam Na (Jaguar House) shrine near where the Talking Cross supposedly first appeared on a tree by a small grotto earth opening.[45] The cruciform stela of Chuumuk Lu'um is the three-person cross noted in the Social War communiqués. Pilgrimage ritual circuits are now sometimes performed in association with these Social War-period communicating crosses. Modern-day pilgrimages associated with communicating crosses sometimes move along paths cut through the forest purposefully aimed at passing by and stopping at stelae (fig. 5.2).[46]

K'atun seating ceremonies mentioned in the *Chilam Balam of Chumayel* followed a route that came quite close, if not actually stopping at, the Chuumuk Lu'um stela-cross.[47] The ritual circuits I am likening to pilgrimage-type behavior[48] seem related to what Hanks has explained for colonial Maya practices known as *tzol peten*, which he translates as the counting or ordering of the land.[49] Counterclockwise movements I note are *not*, as has been postulated, done in order to take the celebrant mystically "backward in historic time."[50] The ritual circuits by which the Maya ordered the land suggests they were

quadripartitioning their ecological geography. It was in this case related to the counting out, or better, ordering and unfolding of, their Tzolk'in 260-day calendar. During the ordering out of the land, priests and nobles would visit specific culturally and historical relevant geographic places. As will be explained later, the travel of these looplike visits would purposely be conducted in counterclockwise movements from the western town of T'ho, now Mérida, to the eastern Yucatán town of Sakíwal, Valladolid.[51]

Ritual ceremonial circuits commemorating k'atun seatings are not only linked to Sakí but also to Kochilla. Roys[52] mentions that Kochilla is just north of the Yaxuná-Kobá causeway, and the following stop, after Kochilla on the ritual circuit, is the site of Ix Xokén.[53] Ix Xokén, otherwise known as Tix Xokén or Xokén, is the village about one kilometer from Chuumuk Lu'um and the stela-cross.[54] The name Xokén, according to my main j'meen consultant, is a bastardized form of *xook k'in*, which means to read or count the suns or days. To count the suns is a form of prognosticating the days of sunshine and rain, that is, the weather, to come throughout the year. The name of the stela-cross site as Chuumuk Lu'um, the earth's terrestrial plane center, is thus quite fitting. One of my main j'meen consultants, my mentor, says that at this location is the place where Itzamná counts the suns, though only he has made this reference or even mentioned Itzamná to me.

My j'meen mentor's extensive knowledge has come down through his father, grandfather, and great-grandfather, all in a long line of ak'iino'ob-j'meeno'ob who, he says, regarded the stelae cross as *hahal k'u Itzamná*, true and central Lord Itzamná. Probed in depth my Maya mentor, who was illiterate, only vaguely understood the ancient significance of Itzamná as the great patron of Maya priests. As far as I know, no other ethnographer has reported the recognition of Itzamná amongst the modern Maya. That current Maya cosmology is somewhat fragmented in terms of its ancient roots should not surprise, considering the great destruction the Maya have suffered at the hands of the Spaniards, the Yucatán Republic, and the Mexican nation-state. As extensive as the veneration of the Chaako'ob rain patrons remains within contemporary Maya ritual, no j'meen with whom I have engaged knows what a Chaak actually looks like. These types of noncorporeal beings are composite entities, so my point on physical attributes may be irrelevant to my Maya consultants. The main focus of my Maya consultants is a form of variable orthopraxis, traditional yet flexible and practical ritual.

The orthopraxis to which I refer here is not a doctrinal orthodox manner of doing ritual but one that follows habitual patterns and conventions. Conducting

ritual production *period* is considered the *correct* thing to do. Many of the rituals held for the monolith of Chuumuk Lu'um are based on the fact that ceremonial productions have to be done lest the stela become upset. Some of my j'meeno'ob consultants not only regard this monolith as sentient but also speak of it as if it were a living plant. My consultants often make offerings to this monolithic cross nearby in the forest at a rock altar that is adjacent to the shaft opening of an *aak-tun* (dry cave) (fig. 5.5). At this shaft location they claim to better communicate with the monolith through its *mootso'ob*, roots, that they say penetrate the earth (fig. 5.6). This aaktun's shaft opening, the root *aak* apparently meaning tortoise or turtle, is preferred for better communicating with the stela-cross. This may have something to do with the high esteem placed on the box tortoises that are said to inhabit these quad-linked earth openings. One of my main j'meen consultants, for example, keeps several tortoise shells because of the cross shape on its plastron.[55] Part of the link from the aaktun to the monolith appears to



figure 5.5: Forest Earth Shaft Opening Offering.
PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR.



figure 5.6: J'meen by Earth Shaft Opening.
PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR.

be the cross icon found on tortoises that reside close to these entrances into the earth. Regardless, by communicating with the stela through shaft openings in the earth, my consultants get to the root of the matter, as it were, as this monolith is conceptualized to be ecologically kuxa'an, alive, like a tree.

My Maya consultants associate both the Chuumuk Lu'um and the X-Balam Na shrines with respective adjacent earth openings that are said to link them to each other as well as to other major communicating crosses. When the Talking Cross supposedly first appeared in 1850, it was adjacent to a water-filled grotto earth opening that is now commemorated in Carrillo Puerto. Maya crosses are considered k'uxan person-beings that are often linked to water sources such as grottoes and caves. Stone has mentioned that caves are areas in which the Maya intrude and respond to, rather than control,[56] and the Mesoamerican indigenous comprehension of their environment into which they are born and raised in intimate relation and knowledge is drastically different from ours.[57] Indigenous American traditional practice is not so much focused on controlling the world than on continuing ancestral interrelationships with nonhuman beings that inhabit it.[58]

My j'meeno'ob consultants, with whom I often enter caves, regard these locales as multidimensional ritual spaces having varying practical uses. To my

consultants, caves are areas for acting out reciprocal relationships with nonhuman beings that reside within and surrounding these entrances into the earth. Heyden, as well as Bernal-García, have mentioned that communicative relationships with cave beings were crucial to Mesoamericans.[59] Taube has also noted that Mesoamericans conceive caves and their generative breath as multidimensional beings.[60] Multidimensional cave beings are moody and capable of both good and evil.[61] Because of their flaky disposition, cave beings must be propitiated when one enters their dark abodes. Maya communicating crosses are often associated with these dark sinkholes, grottoes, and caves. Cross-persons, like these cave beings, are capable of actions that can be deemed benevolent while still volatile. Nonhuman beings associated with communicating crosses and openings into the earth with water sources are very much alike, if not one and the same. In the highlands, for example, Maya crosses adorned with pine boughs are associated with hills, caves, and ancestors.[62] The Maya link these cross-persons to two community objectives: protection and prosperity.[63]

Break with the Past by Colonial Fiat

Indigenous rituals aimed at Maya crosses are not completely unknown to some Roman Catholic priests. Every Roman Catholic father whom I have met visiting the villages has been non-Maya, nonresident, and non-Mayan speaking, and their sacred ceremony of mass is therefore conducted in Spanish, even while most of the women who attend church services are predominantly monolingual speakers of Mayan. My Roman Catholic priest consultants tend to regard the Maya villagers as simple children who stubbornly cling to pagan traditions. Roman Catholic priests rarely enter Maya cross shrines, for they often consider these type of crosses to be *diabólicas*, that is, demonic.[64] Maya crosses are often not very Christian, and the priests tend to recognize this, even if Roman Catholic imagery is sometimes present at the shrines that shelter them. As the Comaroffs have mentioned, missionaries are often acutely aware of resistance on the part of indigenes, as conversion over those colonized is not so readily achieved.[65]

The colonial endeavor is a form of imperialism that centers on the extension of military, political, economic, and religious control over less technologically advanced peoples. The exertion of power over indigenous peoples in conquered lands focused on the following three tactics for the purpose of exacting tribute and consolidating empire: the physical exploitation of natives, the imposition

of authority, and the establishment of political and military bases.[66] Colonial processes are complex, and indigenous populations have much to do, through the pragmatic action of individuals, with their eventual success or failure.[67] Here I focus on three points. First, colonial evangelical practice varied greatly. Second, colonial evangelicals were transformed as much as the presumed converts—colonizers physically traveled to foreign lands populated by indigenous peoples with historically established cultures adapted to their specific environments, not the other way around. Three, colonial missionaries were but a variety of conqueror.

Colonial ethnohistorical documents as public record cannot directly exhibit social protest and, although often taken as evidence based on face value, should be treated with caution. Counterestablishment discourse can be presented in disguised form, and these messages can only be discerned through the tool of ethnographic inquiry.[68] Ethnography is crucial to understanding social processes as those individuals under study practice them in day-to-day life, rather than based on an armchair abstract. Ethnographic data, analyzed in conjunction with historical documents, and indigenous chronicles can produce a diachronic picture of the historical processes of adaptation, transformation, and colonial resistance.[69] Employing a historical ethnographic point of view therefore undoes the stasis for which structural functionalism has been criticized.

Many colonial friars deceived themselves into believing that after conversion, only *hechiceros*, witch doctors, continued their old ways while other converts had been transformed into pious Christians.[70] The Spanish missionaries achieved only partial success, and the ability to convert the indigenes to Iberian Roman Catholicism differed throughout New Spain.[71] Conversion efforts were irregular, and the inconsistency from one friar to another caused varying degrees of Roman Catholic influence on their target communities.[72] The efficacy of converting depended greatly on the first missionary to contact a given tribe, the importance given to teaching them to speak Spanish, and the similarity of agenda on the part of successive friars.[73] Yet, indigenous conversion to full Roman Catholicism did not occur even when the friars were steadfast in their Christianization program.[74] Evangelists did not succeed with complete conversion because existing native social norms and codes were long entrenched.[75]

During Spanish colonialism the conversion process became extremely convoluted, because of both the interplay between Roman Catholic structure and that of local ritual practices and the remoteness of indigenous populations.[76] Roman Catholic missionaries, furthermore, tended to concentrate on the bare

essentials of doctrine, and what was actually being introduced into New Spain was not piety but an Iberian culture of conquest.[77] In the Southwest, as in most of the Americas, Roman Catholic churches were constructed over indigenous structures as a way of physically superimposing Roman Catholic imagery over native icons in order to achieve religious dominance.[78] Because of a lack of clerics throughout the Americas, however, the friars began to designate Indians as *priostes*, festival sponsors, and assign them the responsibility of organizing religious festivities. Roman Catholic-based festivities were incorporated into forced Indian congregations and framed around the friar's Spanish hometown festivals and patron saint. Festival rituals, however, tended to be nativized with indigenous elements as Native Americans were assigned their organizing and implementation.[79] The intention of missionary activity is to rid natives of their indigenous concepts, but changes conversion causes are often external and materialistic.[80]

Mesoamerican Cofradias and Gremios

In order to honor their imported patron saints, Roman Catholic friars in the colonial Americas tended to organize the indigenes under their care in *reducciones*, forced relocation of indigenous populations into small controllable settlements, into Spanish guildlike fraternities called cofradias.[81] The Spanish equivalents of these cofradias were based on trade guilds and very different from those later established in Mexico.[82] The Franciscan Order carried out their America-wide agenda of reducción all the way to northern California until the early 1800s.[83] The Maya of the Yucatán, however, continued to prove uncontrollable even under this system. The Roman Catholic Church could not maintain a strong presence in the Yucatán, and its influence among the relocated Maya diminished drastically when it began failing to support the already weak cofradias.[84] The lack of Roman Catholic support for Yucatec cofradias, according to Farriss, was in part to the result of the nonsacred manner in which the Maya amused themselves during the festivals.[85]

Despite the obvious interplay of pre-Columbian and Roman Catholic belief during the festivals, the Maya were known to smuggle statues onto church altars as well as giving multiple identities to their native icons by applying to them the names of Roman Catholic saints. Not all relocated Maya stayed in the Franciscan reducciones, and those who escaped into the forest continued their native traditions free of Yucatecan political control and Roman Catholic religious instruction.[86] The observance of Christmas, Easter, and All Saints' Day, because of the

reasons mentioned above, was not as highly established amongst the indigenes of the Yucatán as it was for the Highland Maya regions. Nor did these Maya begin to see Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection as the transformation of their world.[87] This continues to the present day among my Maya consultants. Suggestions based on analysis of political rhetoric found in a historical document written during the Social War of Yucatán that the Christian Passion is highly present in what is now Quintana Roo are dubious.[88] I have yet to witness any rituals in the Yucatán even slightly resembling Carnival, the Festival of Games in Chiapas,[89] or the Matachines dances in the Southwest pueblos[90] that tend to replicate or mimic the Passion of the Christ.

An a priori deference to Roman Catholic form is often given the Maya cross as Christian rather than indigenous. Although the precontact Maya had cross imagery, the motif is often regarded as not prominent and therefore apparently inconsequential.[91] I strongly disagree. Mesoamerican indigenous rituals and meanings are often strikingly different from orthodox Mexican Roman Catholic dogma, as witnessed within churches with resident seminary-trained priests.[92] Bricker has admitted, in a work that encompasses a deep historical approach, that some formal Maya characteristics have been retained "for at least fifteen hundred years."[93] Now that I have explained the pertinent colonial history, I will resume my narrative on Maya ritual circuits and a specific annual ritual production my j'meeno'ob consultants conducted.

The Offering of Pigs for Agricultural Bounty

What follows concerns pilgrimage-like festivities my Maya consultants term *gremio*. My consultants' use of the Spanish term gremio, literally guild, is somewhat misleading as it is linked to the previously explained Spanish-derived cofradia system. My Maya consultants are members neither of a fraternity nor guild comprised of tradesmen and shopkeepers based on the same social class or profession. The term gremio is typically used quite liberally in the Yucatán to denote a body of Roman Catholic worshippers who take on a rotating service to a particular saint.[94] Maya villagers, however, have taken the term gremio, as Roman Catholic priests have used it, to correspond to the congregational body of the church and apply it loosely to various rituals displayed within village and intervillage festivals.[95]

My Maya consultants said the gremio I am going to describe is quite old and appears linked to the previously mentioned Postclassic to colonial Chilam

Balam k'atun rituals. The whole event is directly linked to the stela-cross at Chuumuk Lu'um. Corroborating the myth-histories of my consultants are the previously mentioned sixteenth-century Maya chronicles the Chilam Balams wrote that tell of pilgrimage-like activities in and around the village of Xokén.[96] Travel to Chuumuk Lu'um by the Maya is made individually or as part of a group and is conducted on foot or by vehicle. An individual can also make the pilgrimage in spirit, for example, since the festivities require donations, be they monetary or in material goods; those who make contributions have their names read directly to the stela-cross. Pilgrimage to the monolithic cross is made from adjacent villages and from as far away as Maya villages in northern Belize, Central America. Pilgrimage-associated festivities, processions, and dances have only ambiguous links to the Roman Catholic Church.[97] Not only does the church not sanction the particular event being described: the itinerant Roman Catholic priest sees it as sacrilegious.

Some of my Maya consultants living in Quintana Roo often annually undertake this pilgrimage to a village in the neighboring state of Yucatán. Participating in the event does not come cheap and is done in order to reciprocate with and receive agricultural bounty from the stela-cross. This monolith, I reiterate, is linked to natural forces and conceived of as a living plant or tree having great roots that penetrate deep into the earth. For this reason, this location is also variably referred to as *u chukukil yok'ol kaab* (*centro sobre el mundo*), that is, center over the earth. That this event is not very Roman Catholic in practice or conception can be discerned at stages throughout from beginning to end; for example, before departing on this pilgrimage, one of my consultants sometimes places conch shells directly in front of some of his community's crosses. This is done to have the cross beings blow on the conchs and thus awaken and summon the Chaako'ob rain patrons. In the case of the pilgrimage, the placing of the conchs by the crosses is done to alert the stela-cross that its pigs are on the way. Dreams and conch shells, for my consultants, are associated with ancestors and crosses, and a significant correlate here appears to be that the trumpeting of conch shells by the ancient Maya had links to dreamlike states.[98]

This particular pilgrimage is a renewal rite, as its primary focus is to keep the inner earth, the terrestrial plane, and the sky quadripartitioned and in balance, that is, divided yet united. Quadripartitioning is done in order to set the stage for the burning of the symbolically charged four-cornered kool, cornfield, its planting, the coming of the rains, and the eventual harvesting of green and ripe maize. Befitting its ancient history, the stela-cross is not in a village proper

but in a clearing within the forest. Participation in the pilgrimage and rituals to the stone cross garner social capital and prestige whereby legitimacy to political village standing is expressed and maintained. In these Maya communities, social prestige confers respect and support. No vacuous idealizing of religion here. Traditional Maya world views are not about religious salvation but about day-to-day living as experienced within their relational environment.

The kuch (burden), duty, and privilege of pilgrimage sponsorship are rotated amongst various communities and j'meeno'ob priests. This process serves as a mechanism that binds the villages and priests together in the annual raising and renewing of their world. This event, by the raising of the sky from earth and the ordering of the Maya world into a quadripartite division,[99] seems to serve a similar function to the stone settings Landa referenced in the very early colonial period.[100] Landa documented that rain beings, as well as other entities that hold up the quadripartitioned Maya world, were oriented in different world directions with each having different associated colors.[101] Taube has associated these rain beings to Bacab sky holders in relation to a quadripartite nonhuman, associated with clefts and conch and tortoise shells, which Schellhas has designated as God N.[102] Redfield and Villa Rojas, furthermore, also noted that quadripartitioning is related to crosses and the coming of the rains.[103] As discussed further below, the stone-cross that is the focus of this pilgrimage is the place in the Maya world where the rain patrons are said to converge. Paxton, curiously, projects a center zenith point for the Yucatán peninsula, although her interest here is in Chichén Itzá, at approximately the same latitude as this monolith cross.[104]

The Loud Silence of the Pigs

The pilgrimage to the stone-cross concludes after five days of continuous festivities. Each day is latently dedicated, explicitly known only by some j'meeno'ob, to a different world direction, including the center, as associated with a particular rain patron. Classic Period stelae, according to Newsome, seemed to have also recorded the "location where the directional oppositions of the world converge: the crossroads of the earth, sky, and four directions."[105] To reiterate, my Maya consultants regard this monolith as being at Chuumuk Lu'um, the center over the earthly plane, as this is where the rain patrons converge and later disperse. One specific village, whose duty is to provide offerings, food, and entertainment to the stela-cross, sponsors each of the five festival days. These same offerings are simultaneously provided free of charge to anyone who attends and is associated

with these celebrations. Each day and night there are continuous offerings made to the monolith. Each new ritual day begins at *chuumuk k'iin*, midsun or midday, when the sun is at *chuumuk ka'an yan k'iin*, that is, when the sun is at middle sky or zenith. Ritual killings of live animals are said to have been offered to the communicating crosses during the Social War of Yucatán, and, on some days of this pilgrimage, the ritual killing of pigs does in fact occur.[106] Under normal circumstances, my Maya consultants typically pin hogs one side down to the ground or onto a low-lying rectangular stone in order to kill them more easily. The pigs offered the stela-cross, however, are unusually and dramatically thrown on their backs onto a large, raised round altar just as dawn breaks (fig. 5.1).[107]

The pigs are killed on the altar in honor of the monolithic cross under the direction of my main ak'iin-j'meen consultant, who, I mentioned, referred to this stela as Itzamná. What the ritual killing of these pigs is reminiscent of during the pre-Columbian period I leave to the reader. My mentor-consultant says that his grandfather used to kill the pigs directly in front of the *kruz tun*, lord stone. This older practice, he says, is now considered too messy by other attendees who come before the kruz tun monolith. For this reason, although not in complete agreement, my mentor now simply slays the pigs in close vicinity to the stela-cross. My mentor, however, is not the j'meen who physically kills the pigs. The ritual killing of the pigs he leaves to his apprentice-son as his father did with him. Note that the ritual productions I am describing here are very busy. While my j'meen consultant's son is killing the pigs, my mentor walks a bit eastward to greet the dim rays of the soon-to-emerge sun. My mentor likes to greet the sun precisely during the loud squeals he says. This is not an easy ritual to witness because sometimes it has seemed to me that the louder the squeals from the pigs the better.

During the greeting of dawn, my j'meen mentor faces the sun and offers the pigs to *nojoch yuumil k'iin*, great father sun. With his right arm extended forward, my mentor turns approximately 180 degrees clockwise to face the western direction and the slaughtered pigs. All three hogs are butchered and processed on the same round altar where they were slain (fig. 5.7), and their meat is later offered in front of the stela. Throughout the next couple of days, the pork is eaten in a variety of dishes that everyone, including me, past pig squeals aside, relishes in earnest. One key body part of each hog slain, however, is set aside for each day's ending of public rituals. This occurs preferably just before sunset, and what takes place at this moment is called the *u ook'ot nojoch pool k'eek'en* (great pig's head dance).[108]



figure 5.7: Pig Butchering on Raised Round Altar.
PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR.

Farriss, as well as Pohl, have mentioned the dance of the pig's head as a transformation of the Postclassic Maya *uayeb* year-ending celebrations.[109] During the Postclassic Maya uayeb festivities, four wards or towns in rotation were the year-bearer *ahkuchkaab*, cargo or burden, carriers for that solar year. During the rotation of the year-bearer, according to each respective day, particular attention was paid to directional patrons and their associated colors and trees.[110] Thompson believes this rotational system was evident among the colonial village *batabs*, or caciques.[111] Coe extends these festivities further back in time by linking them to the twenty-year k'atun celebrations mentioned previously.[112] Pohl especially links these modern festivities to their ancient analogues, saying that

> archaeologists have spent a considerable number of years and a great deal of money excavating Maya ceremonial centers. Yet, we have very little idea of what rituals were performed there . . . One major fiesta was the transfer of the *cuch* . . . The *cuch* may have embodied the idea of fertility, agricultural prosperity, and the continuity of life. The *cuch* ceremony may also have been associated with Maya rulership.[113]

Farriss sums up an important fact, related to the above, which will become quite relevant in what is to follow:

> Taken together, these and other related Maya terms [per *kuch*] suggest that when its turn came, each ward through its leader, the *ahcuchcab*, assisted the annual deity associated with the initial day of the new year to bear the year through its full cycle—that is, to keep time and the world going on behalf of the whole community.[114]

The modern kuch festivities have of course been transformed from their ancient counterparts. The particular dance of this kuch about to be described, however, although similar in some ways to that held for Roman Catholic saints in other villages, is here done to honor the lord stone-cross and its quadripartitioned space.[115] In seeking their place within the modern world, some of my Maya consultants are using their past, that is, their collective memory, to indirectly state who they are and how they foresee their future. Somewhat related to catharsis-based ideology, although not always, material culture can sometimes serve as aggressive ethnic negotiation markers utilized to manipulate and articulate between the past and present and implicitly function as discourse vehicles for identity politics. Hervik has argued that although the dance of the pig's head can be "traced far back in history . . . few contemporary Maya people in Yucatán . . . see the celebration as a legacy to the past . . . The ritual is carried on as an habitual affair devoid of the coherent meaning it might have had at some point in the past."[116] I do not suggest in the following that Hervik is wrong, but his data are derived from large Yucatecan towns with a visibly larger degree of colonial Roman Catholic impositions.

In the version of the pig's head dance I have documented, only males dance, as they are the ones who hold the kuch-burden, while the women look on with much delight. Some of the males dance while holding the pigs' heads, while others dance squirting *baalche'*, a low alcohol, meadlike drink, toward the women in the audience (figs. 5.8 and 5.9). The ritual involves thirteen initial counterclockwise circular dances followed by a quick and abrupt clockwise repetition of the thirteen turns (fig. 5.10). My mentor tells me the clockwise movement has to be done an instant following the counterclockwise turns, which represented the movement of the sun, in order to *puuk'*, that is, unwind, retract, or undo, the power just given the monolith by their ceremony. Some of my j'meen consultants state that the pig's head dance feeds the kruz tun and if not unwound,

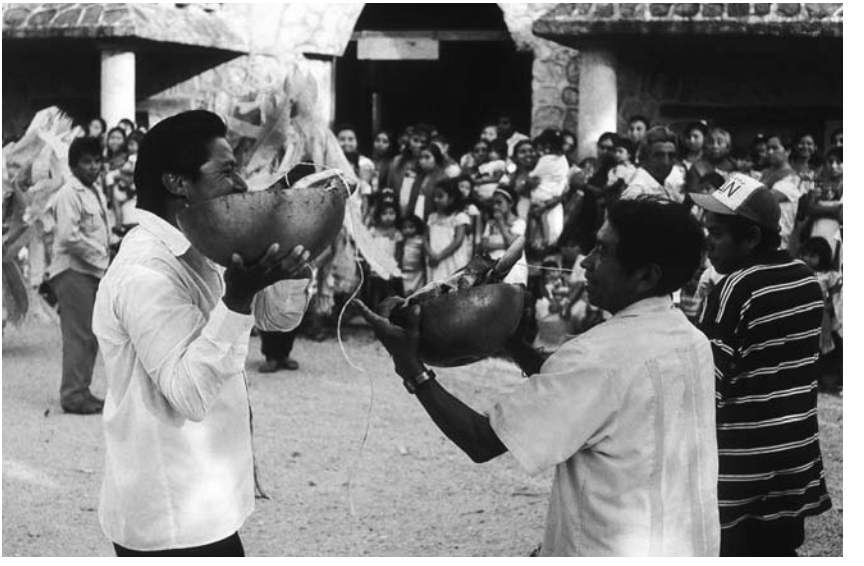


figure 5.8: Dancing of Pigs' Heads.
PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR.



figure 5.9: Splashing Baalche' Toward Women.
PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR.



figure 5.10: Dancing the World Trees.
PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR.

makes the monolith much more powerful than it already is. Others feel that while the stone-cross can be benevolent, it can also act harshly toward them if it is displeased for some reason or another. The displeasure of the stela-cross, they say, has been evident from time to time by previous droughts or widespread illness in the villages. The power of the stela monolith therefore has to be kept in check and balance through ritual ceremonial feedings and unfeedings.

Counterclockwise Processions, Quadripartitioning, and the Path of the Sun

There are many elements to the pig's head dance, or any other Maya rituals, that can easily go unnoticed. One needs to spend undeterminable amounts of time immersed in living, participating, and enjoying life with one's consultants to best understand them. I am not talking here about living apart and setting times to interview informants. My Maya consultants are my friends, and in many respects they are now part of my extended family. My consultants know that I am an anthropologist, and I have tried as best I can to explain what that entails. My friends allow me to take photographs where they usually do not allow them

taken, because I have known many of them since 1997. I always return to the field with multiple copies of the photographs I take for as many of my friends as I can. I laugh and cry with them, and in return they converse and share with me what in part I am sharing in these pages with you. The pig rituals I am here describing are most especially telling regarding how my friends perceive themselves and the world that surrounds them.

The pig's head dance my Maya consultants perform contains many elements that astonish. The ritually killed pigs, although quite dead, are considered to be transformed, still-living beings. This notion is literally expressed in the personal attention the pigs' heads receive and the string of life, signifying breath, that is tied to and emanates from their snouts (figs. 5.8 and 5.10). The lead head, the largest, is danced within a gourd bowl, and this combination indexes the sun. Following the lead head are usually one to two other pigs' heads. The second head represents the moon, while the third, when it is present, is apparently another sky object, which, though not explicitly identified, appears to be the planet Venus. Following the pigs' heads are four to five *ramilletes*, treelike staffs with paper banners. The Spanish word ramillete comes from the word *rama*, which means branch. While ramilletes are Spanish in origin, what is done with them and how they have been adapted is not. The ramillete here, as the word implies, is a tree with abundant and colorful branches. Within these colorful trees are sheltered many birds made of bread (fig. 5.11). The ramilletes in effect are the many-colored world directional trees with their edible birds and therefore sources of sustenance and abundance.[117] It is no coincidence that all the food at this festivity is given away free of charge, paid for by those holding the kuch-burden, as the cargo holders are reciprocating through the stela-cross with the sun for its daily warmth-giving journey across the sky.

While my Maya consultants are feeding the sun during the pig's head dance, they are also manipulating it the way they manipulate other nonhuman persons. The sun and past events for the Maya's ancestors, according to Macri, "had significance quite distinct from any Aristotelian or Judeo-Christian concept of a prime-mover who creates the universe from nothing."[118] Unlike the Chamula Maya, my consultants have not adapted indigenous concepts into a Judeo-Christian theological framework whereby the path of the sun is equated with the death and resurrection of Christ.[119] In this ritual my consultants are reciprocating with the sun, on a very personal level, for its light and life-sustaining warmth. My friends are also demonstrating concepts based on the natural dialectical conception of a necessary, interrelated harmony and balance between



figure 5.11: Placing Birds within World Trees.
PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR.

the underground water, the earth, and the sky. Although apparently apart, these three realms are not discretely separated, unlinked realms and are conceptualized as connected areas that flow into one another. These three areas, then, are not independent realms that require *mystical portals* to be opened in order to access one another. These three permeable areas are all places humans and nonhumans can and do travel to and from if they know how. How do my human consultants travel to these places, since one can only go so deep into caves and certainly cannot fly through the sky? This is accomplished through dreams and dreamlike states.

My Maya ak'iin consultants have power over the sun, as well as other nonhuman persons, and vice versa. Lacadena mentions that the pre-Columbian Maya conceptualized celestial bodies as rational persons with volition, while European thought considers them inert bodies.[120] To some of my Maya consultants, the sun person needs reciprocation, but it also needs prodding, if not outright manipulation, by humans in order for it to continue on its daily path. To relate to or manipulate the sun in live ritual performance, however, the sun person must be brought down to earth even while its physical part, the burning ball in the sky, remains overhead. Why give away so much food, pay for

musicians, and expend so much time and effort on this pilgrimage? Because my Maya consultants' sense of community and being are interlocked with a sense of place that at its core is linked to this stela monolith and by extension the sun. What my consultants are doing here is practical in nature to them by maintaining what has been and is required for their lives to continue. My Maya consultants' sense of home and place is incorporated within various core elements; these are the sun and its associated areas of the sky, the earth, and water, and all are linked to Maya ancestral geography.

Maya cultural geography is defined according to landforms and the sun's apparent path over and under these areas. When my Maya consultants are bringing down the sun onto their playing field they mimic the sun's path in the sky. Primacy, for reasons unclear to me, is given to the right side of the body and may simply have to do with most people, including my consultants, being right-handed. This is the hand that my ak'iin mentor motions with to greet the sun at dawn, as I mentioned earlier. When my mentor brings down the sun, he first faces eastward, then turns clockwise 180 degrees to face westward. His right arm, with this clockwise movement, has been aimed toward the southern horizons. What comes naturally to him, he says, is to move in a motion just like the sun. Now facing westward, my consultant points at the sun and then throws his right arm toward his right, in effect, our direction of north, and now proceeds to create an abstract counterclockwise processional circle on the earth.

These actions, while difficult to explain on paper, result in a counterclockwise, two-dimensional, abstract circle on the earth's surface. This abstract circle, according to my mentor, is the arcing path of the sun as recreated on the earth's plane. Added onto this counterclockwise circle on the ground is that the sun is overhead, thus giving a sense of centrality. The stela-cross's location is, as previously mentioned, known as Chuumuk Lu'um, middle earth, or is also referred to as u chukukil yok'ol kaab, center over the earth. The center point, then, is over, on, and under the earth. The center point in actuality represents zenith as being above and cutting through and beneath the earth. This abstract, vertical zenith line cuts through the middle of the circular procession being conducted on earth, while the abstract horizontal line, representing the arc of the sun, cuts the circle in half from east to west. So far, that leaves us with an abstract circle having a vertical line that cuts through its center point and with an east-west line running through the zenith center point in the circle that cuts the circle in half. As previously mentioned, each new ritual day for my consultants, symbolically and not literally, begins at chuumuk k'in, midsun or midday, when the sun is

directly overhead. When my mentor brings down the sun, he is supposedly, but not always in actual practice, doing this when the sun is approximately overhead at zenith, at which point he considers it proper to begin this ceremony.

Tossing down the sun to the right at zenith, as I mentioned above, creates another line within the circle that runs de facto to what corresponds to our south to north. What my mentor ends up creating on the ground that represents the sun's path, its fire, and its heat is an abstract cross-in-circle. Note that south and north here are not literally equivalent to our compass directions. North and south end up being de facto cardinal directions here because of the south to north abstract line my mentor created. This south to north line is actually zenith thrown-to-the-right and now being abstractly represented on the ground. My mentor's ritual actions have created a de facto cardinal north and south to contend with on the ground, and what he now has on his hands are a quadripartitioned earth and seven world points, or directions.

For my ak'iin consultants, north is both its highest overhead zenith and our cardinal north as well. South is nadir, under one's feet at *chuumuk aak'ab*, midnight, the lowest point of the sun when traveling directly below the earth and also our cardinal south. How this translates, and I believe it does, by analogy into pre-Columbian world views may seem tricky, but it is actually quite easily transferable. What my mentor is basically doing is partitioning his sense of place into quadrants. That the most basic guide for defining place in Mesoamerica has been the five world directions is widely acknowledged. Many scholars have also both stated and implied that Mesoamerican world directions are somehow linked to the annual seasonal cycles of the sun. In full agreement with Paxton, there has been unnecessary debate and talking past each other over whether the ancient Maya specifically recognized our north and south cardinal directions.[121] I believe the ancient Maya, as well as most indigenous Americans, recognized our north and south but not exactly as we do. That the Maya had our east, west, north, and south does not mean they were limited to these directions. The difference in number of directions is implied by the abstract cross-in-circle my main ak'iin consultant creates during some of his rituals. What is paramount here are the de facto four world directions caused by the tossing down of the sun and the three zenith points on the vertical line that cuts through the circle's center. This leaves us with seven world points or directions. These seven world directions create an abstract, three-dimensional sphere when considered that in this scenario, the sun's apparent arc over the earth and assumed symmetrical arc under the earth join to form a circular world. This abstract quadripartitioned

spherical world can now be conceived of as having three nondiscrete three-dimensional areas composed of sky, ground, and inner earth.

My transferring by analogy of this abstract cross-in-circle into the precontact Americas is made secure because other scholars have noted some of the above solar and ritual concepts for other Maya peoples.[122] The contemporary Maya cross transfers both temporally and spatially as a core icon of sense of place as related to the sun for the pre-Columbian Americas. One of the most easily likened pre-Columbian cross icons into the above procession rituals is the large icon found at Postclassic Paquimé known as the cross mound (fig. 5.12). At this northern Mexican site, the large cross icon was placed on the ground adjacent to the pueblo walls for apparent ritual procession purposes. The platformlike cross is surrounded by four large, circular platform mounds that give it a sense of quadripartitioned space. Ceramic vessels from Paquimé, in addition to its cross platform, also depict the quad motif (fig. 5.13), as I have mentioned for other pre-Columbian sites throughout this book, and thus demonstrate the importance of quadripartitioning rituals to Mesoamerican peoples.

The bowls with quad-cross motifs displayed throughout this work appear to signify the sun's path as tied into a relational sense of community, home,



figure 5.12: Paquimé's Cross Mound.
PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR.

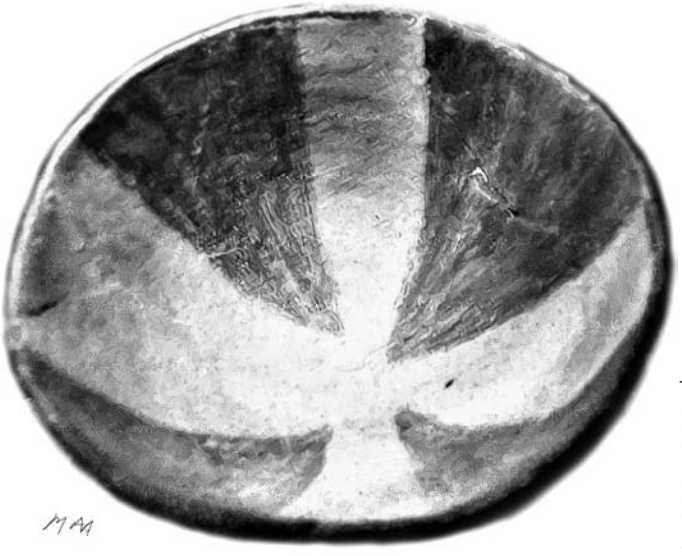


figure 5.13: Paquimé Cross Motif Vessel. Paquimé Museum. ART GENERATED BY THE AUTHOR.

and place. The establishment of ritual space is something ephemeral and not long lasting that can be recreated and dissipated repeatedly. Ritual space for my Maya consultants is not conceptualized as worshipped hallowed ground; rather the establishment of ritual space constitutes generative action that creates a relational bond to place and things.[123] These relationships can include experiences, past and present, composed of local and translocal historic encounters by human and nonhuman actors.[124] Maya myth-history is like a living entity onto itself and unlike our own supposed scientific-objective history. Experience in performance and narrative, that is, oral history, is here associated with places that are imbued with the living ancestors. Maya histories are fluid testimonials that evolve and transform as they relate the past to the present.

The relationships my Maya consultants have to the sun and their behavioral world needs to be constantly renewed through a frequent quadripartitioning of space. This concept of space is not based on a binary separation of the objective and subjective but on that of intersubjective experience based on position, connection, and interaction.[125] Please note that the ritual practice of my Maya consultants should not be thought of as a renewing of the world for the earth's populations at large. My consultants' renewing of the world is quite ethnocentric in scope and is concerned with their communities, their descendants, and their ancestors. My consultants are not even thinking here of other Maya

peoples like those in Chiapas or Guatemala. They even question me as to why these other ethnic groups, although similar to them, are called Maya when they do not speak the language they speak, which is what they recognize as Mayan. The world of my consultants is very specific to their place as home, for the sun focuses its gaze, as they perceive it, on them. My Maya consultants' communities are like an umbilicus because their homes are at the center of the sun's rays and therefore their world.

Other Native American tribes throughout time and space make the same claim of being the people at the center of the world. Gossen, for example, says, "San Juan Chamula is acknowledged by many to be both the real and symbolic center of Indian cultural presence."[126] Wilbert, as well, states that

> the Warao have an anthropocentric world view. They conceive of themselves as living in the center of the terrestrial disk and at the foot of the world axis that connects the earth with the zenith and the cosmic vault. Thus, when a *Warao* baby emerges from the womb of his squatting mother, he falls right into the heart of the universe. Throughout his entire existence, and especially during adulthood, he shares this universe not only with his fellow men but also with a host of spirits who expect him to interact with them according to time-honored patterns of reciprocal behavior.[127]

A central relationship to a cultural sense of space and being is what drives my Maya consultants' reciprocal behavior toward the sun, rain patrons, crosses, water holes, ancestors, cave beings, and so forth. There exists in my consultants' cultural logic a compelling relational mutuality between humans and nonhumans from which neither can disengage. The cultural logic of my Maya consultants is but a common sense built upon nested knowledge and experience comprising relations with their environment, be it community, agricultural, or forest, as perceived through lineage and kinship metaphors. The sun and its associated icon of the quad-cross signify Maya relational ritual as dynamically co-constitutive and not just as reciprocal. The Maya renew the sun and their world, even while the sun and their world renew them. Their actions are based on a social debt and merit reciprocity that varies according to context. These interactive actions are not exclusive to my Maya consultants but are prehistorically and historically extensively demonstrable in the archaeological, colonial, and ethnographic record for the indigenous Americas. Classic Maya imagery shows repeatedly that Maya

rulers not only depicted themselves as being at the top and center of their world but literally emphasized their mastery and legitimacy to do so. Furthermore, they claimed this right in writing and by their physical and concrete presence, in both senses of the word, in, on, and around their built environment.[128]

Ancient Maya rulers appear to have been laying claim to special privilege and the right to rule through their proclaimed special interactive relationship to the sun, the weather, the ancestors, the community, and their homeland. Home is the central point of reference in space that grounds humans. Home in this sense, as opposed to simply house, points to the ideological use of cosmology in sociopolitical terms to lay claim to the right to rule over a genealogy of place, community, and polity. Ancient Maya cities, through the legacy of their rulers and nobles, constantly designated themselves and their built environment as being umbilical centers of sorts. Such claims have been documented for Palenque, Chichén Itzá, Utatlán, Copán, Yaxuná, and Tulum.[129] The concept of an umbilicus here is central to the meaning of home, as that is where life stems from and is sustained. Home equals the anchoring of lineal and by extension, community identification.

Many Maya nobles and rulers are quite extensively depicted wearing ear spools and clothes, carrying staffs, eating and drinking from vessels, as well as living in structures that prominently display the quad motif. This motif appears to be associated with the sun and quadripartitioning rituals. Mesoamerican leaders and polities were constantly and extensively, both temporally and spatially, linking their central place on earth and special relationship to the sun. Much Maya imagery, in relation to lineage-based rituals or demonstrating relational actions with ancestors, includes glyphs that pertain to what is called the sky band. Within the sky band, prominently displayed at the bottom of the Tablet of the Cross (fig. 2.12), are the two icons noted in chapter 2 as one being the right-angle kan cross surrounded by four dots glyph, toward the left of the skull, that signifies the sun; while the other is the crossed-bands glyph, toward the right of the skull, that signifies the ecliptic. In this same figure the crossed-bands repeat within the vessel directly over the skull, and both representations are flowerlike and have a circle-in-the-middle of the bands. Quad-flowers with crossing bands and circle-in-the-middle are quite common in Maya imagery. Cups and other ceramics depicting crossed-bands with circle-in-the-middle are also quite common (fig. 5.14). The crossed-bands and the kan-cross icons are closely related, although not exactly alike, and are often placed within similar contexts.

In my previous description of Maya rituals associated with the killing of the pigs, I noted that for my consultants, our north cardinal direction ends up de

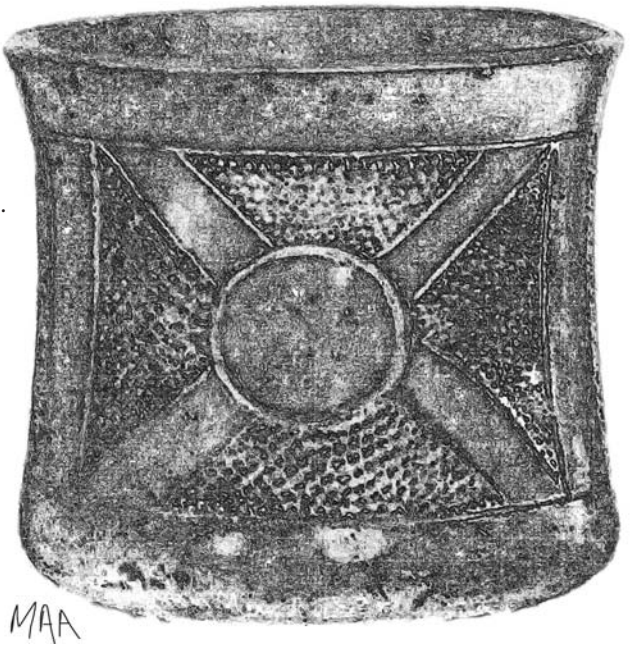


figure 5.14:
Dzibichaltun Crossed-Bands Cup.
ART GENERATED BY THE AUTHOR.

facto when my mentor ritually tosses the sun's path onto the earth's playing field. Similar to what I note above for my consultants, Gossen mentions that for the Tzotzil Maya, north is the sun's maximum point of heat at zenith.[130] Villa Rojas recorded that for his Maya consultants, the east to west direction was of primary significance, while north and south were but sides to the sun's corridor.[131] Brotherston and Ades, Brotherston, and Coggins state that similar concepts, giving primary significance to the east to west sun's path, have been applied in pre-Columbian Mesoamerica cosmology, with north and south being vertical directions rather than our cardinal equivalents.[132]

Similar to Closs, León-Portilla has argued against the above points for the pre-Columbian Maya, since he claims that making xaman, that is, north, also representative of center would make the term and concept of north too ambiguous and that the Mayan word of xaman does not mean center.[133] I do not agree. Does xaman literally have to mean center to also give it this indexical link? Context and indigenous epistemologies are paramount when it comes to the translation of foreign cultural concepts. My Maya consultants use xaman both for our zenith and our geographic north, and they are certainly not confused: what they mean by xaman is clarified within the context of their discourse

and actions. The same appears to be the case with at least the Postclassic Maya. Justeson, for example, mentions that a fifth directional glyph may have been formed by the adding of a qualifier, meaning within, to *kaab*, that is, earth, and indicative of zenith and nadir.[134] Closs noted that many city plans for pre-Columbian Mesoamerica give evidence that geographical north and south were recognized, but what would make these specific points not arising from the tossing down of ritual north as zenith onto the earth?[135] Closs did in fact admit to north and south being sectors on the horizon rather than our cardinal points. Could he therefore have meant intercardinal sectors then for north and south, as my Maya consultants seem to do?

Cannot xaman and nohol, respectively, mean north and south as zenith and nadir, while also being intercardinal sectors along the northern and southern horizon, in accord with the arcing path of the sun, if thrown onto the earth in the manner of my mentor consultant?[136] Watanabe mentions that other Maya groups also conceptualize north and south as zenith and nadir along with being geographic horizons. In addition, he says, some Mayas regard east and west not as cardinal points but as the respective horizons as determined by the sun's seasonal movement along each of these lines.[137] León-Portilla admits what I believe demonstrates to some degree that the debate above concerning xaman and nohol has been of little consequence by saying, "Rather than simply oriented to what we call the four cardinal points, the universe of the Maya appears distributed in four grand cosmic segments that in their turn converge on a point, the center, the fifth direction of the world."[138]

Sosa, working in Yucatecan communities closely related to those of my Maya friends, has documented that his consultants also regard north and south as intercardinal directions as related to north as zenith and south as nadir thrown ritually onto the earth's plane.[139] Villa Rojas explained similar concepts when referring to how cross shrines, his example being the one at Tixcacal Guardia, Quintana Roo, were planned out geographically to coincide with the rising and setting of the sun as it oscillated between the solstices.[140] His diagram of the example of how the Maya geographically planned the structural plan of the Tixcacal cross shrine is in fact reminiscent of the crossed-bands glyph that signifies the ecliptic (fig. 5.15). I would add to Villa Rojas's observations above that the Maya give primacy to building and planning at the eastern horizon as it is associated with dawn. This action is practical in nature, as dawn brings daylight rather than the darkness associated with sunset and the west. The lak'iin Maya compound, which signifies the breaking away of the sun or east, typically includes

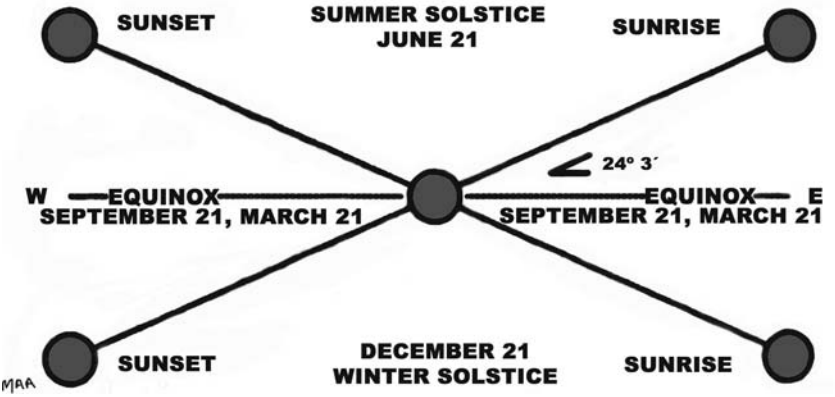


figure 5.15: Villa Rojas's Maya Space.
ART GENERATED BY THE AUTHOR AFTER VILLA ROJAS (1988).



figure 5.16:
Lak'iin East Glyph.
ART GENERATED BY THE AUTHOR.



figure 5.17:
Chik'iin West Glyph.
ART GENERATED BY THE AUTHOR.

crossed-bands with a middle circle, like the ecliptic glyph (fig. 5.16). The chik'iin Maya glyph, however, the placing of the sun or west, typically includes the right-angled cross (fig. 5.17). This is not a likely coincidence, as the Maya right-angled cross is associated with funerary bundles for communicating with the ancestors. Funerary bundles were often kept, significantly, in home shelters of their own.

Shelters for the Living Ancestors

The placing of ancestral figures and bundles in indexical houses, what we call shrines, follows a widespread practice throughout ancient Mesoamerica. Headrick has suggested that the Street of the Dead in Teotihuacán, Mexico, was more than appropriately named by the México of Tenochtitlán.[141] Bundled items tend to be linked to quadripartitioning and communicating with the ancestors. Sarah Clayton has noted that some Teotihuacán burial context vessels also have the quad-cross motif.[142] Many archaeologists simply classify, if they even note, painted or slipped quad motifs on ceramic vessels as abstract geometric art. Clayton, however, has noted that some of the Teotihuacán quad motifs are simply etched or lightly burnished onto the vessels (figs. 5.18).[143] Some of the other vessels Clayton has documented from Teotihuacán have quad-cross motifs that are only barely visible and easily missed while others have graffiti-type cross icons (fig. 5.19). Gómez Chávez has reported pecked crosses as well as quad motifs on bowls for this same city.[144] In addition, Séjourné, as well as Spence and Rattray, have also noted graffiti-type incised quad motifs, in accord with Clayton's observations mentioned above.[145] The above practices are not exclusive to Teotihuacán. Many such vessels having the quad motif in various forms, like the Teotihuacán examples above, have simply gone unnoticed. A case in point is a Maya vessel from Balamku, Campeche, that also has a graffiti quad-cross motif etched into it (fig. 5.20). Here I emphasize the great extent the quad-cross motif must have been present on pre-Columbian vessels. Considering the vast quantity still readily visible in the remnant archaeological record, this gives implied evidence as to why this native icon is still so extremely important to contemporary Maya peoples.

Most of the examples of the quad-cross I point out in this work are from an unsystematic survey and not from intensive research regarding the ceramic collections of each mentioned site. The quad-cross motif on ceramic vessels and other Mesoamerican material culture is without a doubt extremely widespread temporally and spatially. Most of the quad-cross motif vessels were placed in



figure 5.18: Teotihuacán Quad Motif Vessel.
COURTESY OF SARAH CLAYTON.



figure 5.19: Teotihuacán Quad Motif Vessel.
COURTESY OF SARAH CLAYTON.

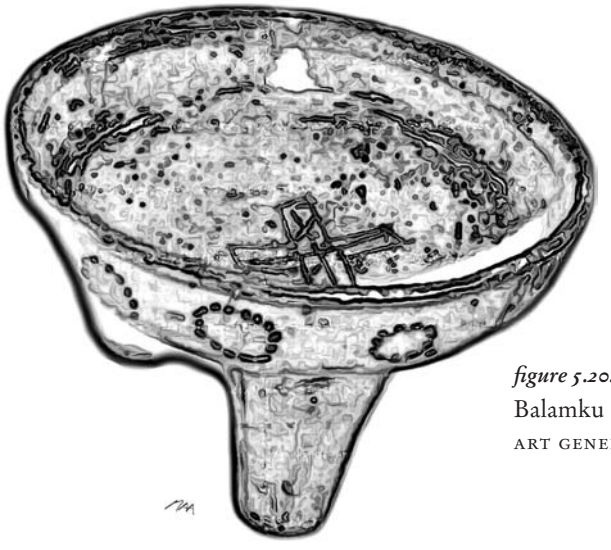


figure 5.20:
Balamku Quad-Cross Vessel.
ART GENERATED BY THE AUTHOR.

context with deceased people who were apparently selected to be ancestors. Many of these ancestors were more than likely linked to a geographic sense of home and place. Townshend noted that ancestral bundled patrons of central Mexican cities like Tenochtitlán, the founder being Huitzilopchtli, blurred the line between mythic and real figures.[146] The bundling and veneration of a common-lineage ancestor implies the maintenance of a continual relationship with that noncorporeal person. Many masks from Teotihuacán bundles, as Headrick noted, "have open mouths, showing that they are capable of speech. This indicates that the Teotihuacán bundles, like other Mesoamerican bundles, could communicate with their living descendants."[147] Newsome further mentions that the ancient Maya could receive communications from nonhuman guides, assistants, and ancestors.[148] The ancestors, through bundles or other subject matter their descendants created, continued to be physically present, communicate with, and guide those caring for them. The implications here are that bundles and other communicating objects have a very practical function within past and present Mesoamerican indigenous world views. I turn in the following chapter to Mayan communicating bundles.



figure 6.1: Maya Funerary Bundle with Green Cross.
PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR.

CHAPTER 6

Communicating Bundles and the Ancestors

Historically Traditional Maya Cosmologies

There is nothing in Mesoamerican thought to authorize our believing that there existed a body-soul dichotomy. To the contrary, according to indigenous thought, the embodiment of psychic entities is quite apparent.

—ALFREDO LÓPEZ AUSTIN,
The Human Body and Ideology: Concepts of the Ancient Nahuas

Ancestors and lineage are ubiquitous themes that pervade the ethnographic and ethnohistoric literature of Yucatán . . . The tenacity with which Yucatec and highland Maya groups continued to revere these icons in which their identity—past, present, future—was vested is attested by the number of individuals tortured and killed during the Spanish Inquisition.

—PATRICIA A. MCANANY,
Living with the Ancestors: Kinship and Kingship in Ancient Maya Society

The longer one lives amongst them, and the better one gets to know them, the more one realizes that their Christianity is, to a great extent, merely a thin veneer, that fundamentally their religious conceptions, and especially their ritual and ceremonies, are survivals.

—THOMAS GANN AND J. ERIC THOMPSON,
The History of the Maya:
From the Earliest Times to the Present Day

Historical Traditions, Ancestors, and Human Practice

As noted in chapter 1, I use practice theory as an analytical tool, as it allows me to focus on the structural dynamics embedded within human discourse, elite and non-elite, and how these processes play out historically.[1] Accordingly, then, practice is my prime method of looking at Mayan communicating bundles and their relationships to those who venerate them. As circumstances change, as demonstrated in the pilgrimage action discussed in the previous chapter, individuals or coalitions of individuals may change their relationship to societal codes and norms in order to remain viable.[2] These processes are best described as reformulations, since periodic changes do not indicate cultural collapse.[3] Core customs and traditions that inspire politics and ideologies of identity do not die out easily even at the point of a gun or threat of torture. Sahlins has termed the paradoxical process of adapting customs to foreign commercial economies as neotraditional development.[4]

In this chapter I further examine intense cultural contact and social transformations. In order to better comprehend the complex process of cultural transformation, I introduce the concept of *historical traditions* rather than emphasize a false dichotomy between the modern and the traditional. In analyzing change and continuity, I draw on the following cultural phenomena: colonial evangelization, revitalization, transformed traditions, structural revaluation of traditional forms, ethnic affirmation, and cultural resistance. By interjecting practice theory I demonstrate how applying a dialectical approach, which looks at the relationship between cumulative historical traditions and the introduction of new ideas, illuminates how transformations recapitulate to varying degrees the social structure that spawns them. Through the application of a historically bound theory of practice, we can better comprehend the complexity of cultural change, not as invented traditions, but as alternative dimensions that remain constrained by collective organizational structures.

Historical traditions here are not idealistic essentialisms based on the exotic. Traditions here are the historically bound processes by which individuals anchor themselves to home and society. Historical traditions are not static and are always in articulation with variable institutional, ideological, and symbolic responses triggered by human reactions.[5] During times of colonial evangelization, the quotidian provides individuals with an everyday wider domain of personal agency in deciding what is accepted and what is rejected. History is always made, in real time and space, by individual agents operating within their day-to-day social boundaries.[6] Societies are not static, and cultures transform, thus helping them to survive historically, by the actions of individuals adopting foreign practices as they see fit.[7] What colonists encountered in the indigenous Americas were long-established social structures that included very different world views about how humans fit within their ecological surroundings.[8] Typically these indigenous world views were centered on practices associated with venerating the ancestors. Any sense those colonized made of Christian doctrine within such a missionary framework had to be set within the home where the ancestors lived. The home structure is where life makes sense and is cast day in, day out. In this chapter I contextualize Mayan communicating bundles as set within a structure linked to the ancestral ways of the home.

Social analysis of religious forms needs to concentrate on the dialectics of human existence in the task of everyday living and in the temporal and spacial structure within which life is practiced, rather than on abstract description.[9] The Comaroffs, for example, have documented that the presence of material adoptions, even if imprinted with Christian forms, does not indicate that full conversion or assimilation has taken place.[10] Native responses to structural crisis, as I delineate further for the Maya in this chapter, must be contextualized and understood in terms of indigenous epistemologies.[11] Before analyzing Mesoamerican communicating bundles, in order to minimize abstract description, I will first lay out the following. Linda Schele, a renowned Mayanist who has regrettably passed on, said in an interview just before her death, "I am about to become an ancestor."[12] I very much respect Schele, as much of her work inspired my early studies, had an impact my decision in seeking to study as an undergraduate under Karl Taube, and influenced my deciding on this profession. My thoughts concerning her statement, though, are that those who die do not get to choose whether they become ancestors. Dying, in terms of Maya cosmology, does not automatically make one an ancestor.

In the Maya world the living control the dead to some degree and first do so by deciding who becomes an ancestor. That the dead linger around humans is for the most part unimportant, as they can be ignored, not remembered, and forgotten. *Kiimilil*, mortality, for my j'meen consultants is a very ambiguous concept. The same ambiguity extends to *kiimij*, which means death or to die. To be moribund, *taan u kiimil*, means that the person's being, what in Judeo-Christianity is a human soul residing in an earthly body, is not at that moment *tethered* to its expiring body. That person, now moving about invisibly at a relatively close distance to its moribund body, must be cajoled, persuaded, or harassed into returning to the body vessel it was tethered to lest its human flesh cease to function. According to Bourdieu, as well as Ortner, it is in the domestic domain where the ancestors and their customary practices continue to live on.[13] Individual practice, as Bourdieu has explained, is conditioned through a lived experience that cares little for explanation according to intellectual logic.[14]

Many Mexicans and Mexican-Americans commemorate the Días de los Muertos, Days of the Dead, which in reality do not have much to do with the dead per se. Commemoration of the Días de los Muertos takes place on two dates, November 1 and 2, set within Roman Catholic doctrine for the observance of All Saints' and All Souls' respectively. The first day is for the living to remember the saints for their good deeds and miracles. The second day is set aside to pray for souls in limbo or purgatory. Those souls in purgatory, not in limbo according to current Roman Catholic doctrine, continue to be present in some homes in culturally defined time and space, that is, in memory. I note elsewhere that while the celebration of the dead follows the Roman Catholic liturgical calendar, in many rural indigenous communities the Church hardly encourages this practice.[15] Many of the actions conducted during the Days of the Dead celebrations are taken from Roman Catholic practice. The Church, however, tends not to support these customs because rural indigenes are not honoring souls and saints but seem to behave as if they were in real-time interaction with their ancestors.[16]

The above actions can superficially, without intensive cultural immersion, seem like cultic ancestor worship, but they are not. Indigenous Mesoamerican peoples tend to approach their ancestors in various manners, depending on their rationale for whatever contact and whatever relationship exists for them. According to Haley and Fukuda, Mesoamerican ancestors "remain within the social network and they maintain the same relative positions they occupied

when they were alive . . . The dead are no different from the living other than being dead . . . The dead are welcomed into the homes as equals."[17] The Días de los Muertos celebration is misnamed as it is anything but about the dead: these days are used to commemorate the living and their continual relationship with their ancestors as manifest in culturally defined real time and space.[18] The purpose of venerating one's ancestors has explicit practical purposes. As Haley and Fukuda note at length:

> Underlying this interpretation of the relationships between the living and their deceased kin is the tacit assumption that because the dead are dead, they are no longer part of the village social systems . . . That assumption is false and so leads to a misinterpretation of the situation. If you accept that the dead kinfolk are still part of the social network, we can easily restate . . . (1) the townsfolk have a social obligation to adorn the Day of the Dead altars just as they have obligations to parents, siblings, godparents and others. Failure to meet any of those obligations almost always carries consequences that could be perceived as dire; (2) Oaxacan villagers frequently consult with kin or request help with specific projects and this case is no different. Those things they would ask of the living, they also ask of the dead. They ask for and expect help from all kin, dead or alive . . . These requests for aid addressed to the dead are ritualized. They could be mistaken for prayers but they are not.[19]

Many people who practice the celebration of the Días de los Muertos are not clear on which elements are pre-Columbian and which Roman Catholic in these festivities, nor does it matter to them.[20] The practice of what we call tradition relies on subtle conscious and unconscious adaptive changes to particular historical circumstances. This process is not incidental, and what is most significant is the coexistence of change with persistence as the presence of one does not negate the other.[21] Historical analysis cannot precisely indicate when specific transformations occur. Social processes, however, encourage individual actions to follow cumulative structural patterns.[22] Indigenous populations are not exceptions to this, and their actions are not marginal to either ancient or contemporary historical processes.[23] Contemporary Maya j'meeno'ob ritual intercessors tend to converge the past not only with the present but with the future. Within these actions they sometimes strategically adopt and adapt Roman Catholic imagery into their ritual repertoire. These processes

are complex, for what may superficially appear to be conversion is usually more apparent than real.[24] While my Maya consultants' rituals may be somewhat categorized as being composed of religious beliefs, they cannot and should not be separated from other indigenous Maya norms.[25] My consultants' actions should not be reduced to solely ideological resistance either. According to Bourdieu, it is the same with resistance as with politics: its historical practice is not limited to utilitarian action only in the face of tangible, explicit domination.[26] The opposition of resistance to nonresistance, as with politics to nonpolitics, is a false dichotomy.[27] My Maya consultants in their day-to-day living are simultaneously agents and symbols, producers and products, and creators and what is created.[28] This is especially visible in their relationships to persons we would consider to be dead, past, and gone.

Structure of the Conjuncture: Ancestral Bundles as Indexical Fields of Metaphors

As mentioned in chapter 3, one of the native customs the friars arriving during the Spanish conquest noted was the widespread practice of Mesoamericans consulting what the clergy considered their demonic oracles. Many peoples throughout the world practice the veneration of and communication with ancestors, what missionaries often assume to be the worship of deified ancestors.[29] As Evans-Pritchard noted, the accounts colonial missionaries wrote are often quite biased. As he says;

> I must caution students not to accept, above all in religious matters, what they may find in mission literature . . . The fact that he has been among a people for a long time proves nothing . . . It is, or should be, obvious that since the natives do not understand . . . the missionary in his propaganda has no option but to look in the native language for words which might serve for such concepts as "God," "soul," "sin" and so forth. He is not translating native words into his own tongue but trying to translate European words . . . into words in a native tongue.[30]

Dominant societies' categories are often force-fit onto those they try to control or already dominate. One cannot accuse others of idolatry and false worship, as noted in chapter 3, unless they are assumed to have the same theological conceptions. Native Americans, however, not understanding many colonial religious

concepts, were not prone to abandon their native practices.[31] Native Americans, as other non-Western peoples, can readily incorporate some of the icons and symbols of colonial missionaries because lacking strict theological codes makes these world views highly adaptable in reformulating innovations into their indigenous structure.[32]

In chapter 2 I briefly mentioned that the Maya and other Mesoamericans variably buried their dead under the floor, just outside of houses in residential shrines, and within pyramidal structures.[33] As Smith noted for the México:

> Placement of burials in and around the house gives clues to Aztec attitudes toward death. Deceased children were still considered part of the family, and they took their place within the domestic compound. It is likely that families conducted rituals or made offerings to their deceased members, much as modern Mesoamerican peoples.[34]

The Mesoamerican dead have also been variably bundled, cremated, or both and then placed in urns. The highly variable funerary practices associated with Mesoamerica's dead are often puzzling, but this is only because we often try to box in indigenous funeral patterns into what to us constitutes a final resting place in accord with our categories of burial, tomb, and cemetery. The answers to the problems concerning crosscultural analysis are not easily forthcoming. What appears chaotic and random is not, according to the fluid nature of indigenous American funerary practice.

Although funerary urns are not composed of cloth material, as that used for bundling, their indexical function can be one and the same. The objective of bundling is to enclose and shelter. Whether the material used for such enclosing or sheathing is earth, cloth, ceramic, or stone is only relevant in terms of durability and aesthetics. Bundling *is* enclosing *is* bundling. A bundle does not have to be composed of pliable material but can take many forms. A bundle within this view can be composed of flesh and bones like a living being. A bundle within these world views does not signify that its contents are dead but often quite the opposite. México funerary urns serve as a good example here since these ceramics are, in accord with the understandings above, a form of bundling. Some of these urns depict communicating faces in association with both the quad-cross and crossed-bands motifs (fig. 6.2). Key indexes associated within Mesoamerican world views, to reiterate, were related to the sun, weather, home and place, and the ancestors. Because of its extensive temporal and spatial occurrence, most

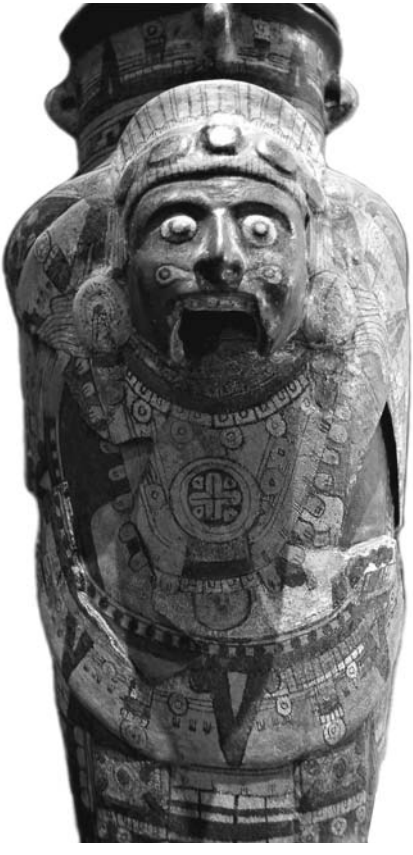


figure 6.2:
México Funerary Urn with Quad-Cross and Crossed-Bands. Museo Nacional de Antropología, México.
PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR.

everyone within the precontact Americas probably understood the significance of the quad-cross icon. An identical quad-cross as exhibited on Mexican funerary urn figure 6.2 is seen at the México warrior-associated site of Malinalco.[35] That the México associated the dead with the sun and quadripartitioning ritual is demonstrated by the warrior-associated decapitated head of Coyolxauhqui with her quad-cross bell motifs. Similar significance appears to be the case with México warrior-associated feasting bowls depicting crossed-banded, quad-crossed femurs (fig. 6.3), as well as Mixtec warrior-associated drinking vessels that depict cross-banded long bones and other ceramics that associate ritual execution knives with quad-cross motifs.

Even if not a universal human social behavior, in many preindustrial societies there exist nonfamilial relationships of what we might call blood brothers that can be likened to a form of kinship. Sahlins makes a point for Polynesia that lineage and brotherhood do not have to be marked by actual blood ties. He stresses that strong social bonds can be ritually created through alliance and maintained through a "performative structure" that is continually "making relationships out of practice . . . [where] kinsmen are made as well as born."[36] Although these tight relationships are not genetically linked, they nevertheless form and maintain formidable bonds based on similar ideological views.



figure 6.3: México Warrior Feasting Bowl with Bone Quads and Bone Crossed-Bands. Museo Nacional de Antropología, México.
ART GENERATED BY THE AUTHOR.

As these relationships are cast within ideological frameworks, their bond can often be much stronger than those with actual blood relatives. As living indices of shared ideology, lineage, identity, social organization, and sense of place, ancestors matter greatly to individual persons. Kin-associated human remains, as Chapman suggests, and their contextual burial-related artifacts characterize persons and their social relations with the living by the creation of a "corporate identity."[37] McAnany has stated a crucial point that is pertinent to my linking of kin, ancestors, and the quotidian to resources and production. She says, "I speak of home in the sense of an economic, ritual, political, and social hive of activity in non-industrial society."[38] This is what forms a strong genealogy of identity as shared with a sense of place and being.[39]

Politico-Religious Kinship, the Self, and Communicating with the Ancestors

We know that the elite Classic Maya, as did other Mesoamericans, as shown in chapter 2, sometimes depicted their ancestors in cartouchelike quatrefoil spaces. Sometimes seen as an Eliade shamanic-type portal or gateway into mystical otherworlds, this quatrefoil shape simply indexes the living ancestors as within these peoples' daily, quadripartitioned behavioral ecology.[40] Mesoamericans live within a quadripartitioned world, and this is where they and their ancestors continually interact. The quatrefoil shape is highly

reminiscent of the quad-flower-cross motif, as mentioned in chapter 4, and the Maya sometimes speak of the ancestors as if living or emerging from flowers.[41] The realm of the ancestors is not some supernatural world but is right smack in their descendants' community and home space. It is where bees, butterflies, and hummingbirds dillydally to and fro in the warming sun's rays while sipping nectar. The regenerative, colorful, and fragrant flower world of the ancestors is in the world of the living.

Little attention has been given so far in our studies regarding how Mesoamericans understand their notion of self. Note that I do not here mean a universalistic notion of self as based on a body and mind duality per Descartes.[42] Personhood is a differential cultural construct and not a physiological given.[43] Despite so much ink spilled regarding Maya religion, only within the last decade have serious questions on Mesoamerican personhood begun to be significantly addressed. Houston, Stuart, and Taube, for example, state that "for the Classic Maya, the 'person' remains a more distant, almost conjectural notion, sketched by comparative anthropology but elusive to the epigrapher and iconographer."[44] Monaghan points out that personhood in Mesoamerica appears to be based on human characteristics and the possession of destiny.[45] In addition, however, we need to add what, if anything, differentiates a human or human characteristics from those beings that are nonhuman. Is there a difference? Is being a human the same as being a person universally both temporally and spatially?

Direct historical analogies based on indigenous epistemologies are extremely important for our understanding of the ancient past. My Maya consultants see the world and relate to it in often drastically different forms than I do, and our world-view differences sometimes cause me great frustration. Recognizing our epistemological differences with non-Western peoples and accepting them is not the same thing. Many of my Maya consultants conceive of illness, for example, despite the inroads of modern medicine into their villages, as not caused by what but by whom. When illness occurs within the Maya villages where I work, the blame often falls on a nonhuman person and not what we consider some form of microscopic pathogen. My j'meeno'ob consultants know how to communicate with nonhuman persons that cause illness as well as with plant persons that can help with curative treatments. Some of my j'meeno'ob consultants not only communicate with nonhuman persons associated with plants but also with bundles, crosses, rocks, speleothems, coral, water, trees, and animals.

The Exhumation of Bones: Communicating Bundles Are Persons Too

Redfield and Villa Rojas stated that their contemporary Maya informants, like most of my consultants, related to crosses everywhere in their natural surroundings.[46] These views are ancient, albeit transformed and adapted, and Roman Catholic priests working in Quintana Roo have confessed to me that they would rather these pagan Maya crosses go away and therefore do not allow these idols in their resident churches. The typical condemning view of my Roman Catholic priest consultants is simply stated in this one quote: "*Estos Mayas parecen estar encadenados a sus costumbres antiguas y los que parecen que no demuestran lo mismo al voltear la espalda*," that is, "These Maya seem chained to their ancient customs and those who don't appear to demonstrate the tendency to do so once one's back is turned." Some Roman Catholic priests see the ritual practices of my Maya consultants as not only wrong but also heretical.[47] Some priests do admit, although hesitantly, that perhaps non-Roman Catholic, traditional Maya customs serve a form of cultural coherence for them, and they therefore sometimes put up with practices with which they disagree. One of these Maya ritual practices is the exhumation, bundling, sheltering, feeding, caring, and communicating with ancestors.

Despite pressures from their state governments to stop, on the basis of supposed health concerns, many Maya continue the practice of exhuming their dead. Contemporary Maya exhumation practice can be perplexing if looked at historically. Most contemporary Maya exhumations take place within modern cemeteries. Despite Christian influence, the difference between the behavior of my Maya consultants and the Roman Catholic priests toward the dead is palpable. In analogy, the interpretation of ancient Maya burials, although sometimes entombed in mausoleums of sorts, is a highly complicated matter for archaeologists.[48] What we may see as mausoleums may within Maya world views be something other than sepulchers for the dead; such repositories may function as the splace, that is, a homelike place, where human bone is used to establish and ritually continue personal relations with the living. As Fowler, as well as Pollard, noted, artifacts and fragments thereof seem to be brought into context with human remains for the reasons noted above. Fragmented pottery and scatters composed of broken ceramics seem to be often par for the course in many ancient Maya rituals.[49]

As a cross-cultural comparison here, Jones noted, "In tandem with the accumulation and fragmentation of human bodies, we observe artifacts being

treated according to similar principles . . . The deliberate fragmentation, distribution and exchange of artifacts are also evident . . . We also have evidence for the deliberate breakage of pottery and its deposition in . . . distinct contexts."[50] Making Maya comparative funerary behavior analysis more difficult, however, is the relative scarcity of ancient human burials, elite and non-elite, found in relation to what must have been great population sizes. The amount of skeletal material found in ancient Maya cities baffle as the sheer numbers simply do not add up.[51] Where are all the human bones? Ancient Maya skeletons could not just evaporate, leaving burials no contextual evidence as to their presence. Could the practice of exhumation been widespread for the ancient Maya? We know that the ancient Maya exhumed some of their dead, and the evidence is particularly visible in Postclassic Mayapán residential shrines.[52]

Ancient Maya funerary bundles were lineage, community, and home related, and most of what remains in the archaeological record is elite in context. The elite context of most artifacts apparently led Thompson to state the following: "The Maya peasant made no claim to participate in these cults, which surely were linked to the ruling class . . . The absence of any traces of ancestor worship in present-day Yucatan or among the related peoples of British Honduras supports the above conclusion."[53] I disagree. The apparent error in Thompson's assumption is that he was seeking to observe the Maya *worship* their dead. Worship behavior is more readily observed from my Maya consultants who are more acculturated to Roman Catholic dogma, in their views toward the saints and the Virgin Mary, and have accepted more of its theological doctrines. Ancestor veneration, as opposed to worship, is based on transient but repetitive reciprocal action focused on social-based debt and merit. Furthermore, it is informal at its core and quite fluid. Ancestor veneration is still visible in some Quintana Roo villages, and the practice thrives amongst some of my Maya consultants. As of this writing, in fact, I have been asked to help exhume and bundle one of my past j'meen consultants in relation to my carrying the kuch-burden for the stela-cross mentioned in chapter 5.

Villa Rojas mentioned that although his Maya informants in the village of Tusik wrapped deceased bodies in shrouds, they never exhumed their dead.[54] Why did Villa Rojas bother to mention what did not occur, that is, that exhumation of the dead did not take place in Tusik? I have come across a village or two in Quintana Roo where exhumation of the dead no longer takes place. This is the result, though, of recent changes at the hands of the village *comisario*, mayor, who, since converting to evangelical Christianity, does not want exhumations to

continue. Villa Rojas, unfortunately, does not clarify his claim for Tusik by contrasting it with the data he gathered in Chan Kom that Redfield later wrote up. Chan Kom inhabitants were documented exhuming interred relatives' bones approximately three years after their burial. Redfield and Villa Rojas explain the exhumation of bones for Chan Kom in a very functional manner by saying that because of "the shallow soil of the country," the behavior was required "to make room for new interments."[55] I am not convinced. None of my Maya consultants has ever given or even remotely hinted at shallow soil as being the reason they exhume human bones.

Redfield and Villa Rojas's detailed elaboration on the above indicates why the Maya exhume their dead. As they say, "Three men go to the cemetery and take out the bones . . . [then] the bones are placed on a new cloth and cleaned. Another piece of cloth is put in a small box; the bones are laid therein . . . [and] then the box is carried back to the village and into the house and placed on a little stand under a table, on which the food is set out."[56] This description smacks of behaviors associated with the Days of the Dead throughout the Mexican countryside. Surprisingly, though, my Maya consultants engage little with their dead on November 1 and 2. These dates, as mentioned previously, are the Roman Catholic liturgical feast days known as All Saints' and All Souls,' and I was somewhat perplexed when I first saw that my Maya consultants did practically nothing on those specific days. What was wrong with them, I thought, when they seemed so traditional? What was wrong, it turns out, were my ethnographic expectations in anticipating what I thought *should* happen.

As stated in the previous chapter, the colonial congregating tactics and associated guildlike assembling of the Maya into Roman Catholic-patterned fraternities did not work very well in the Yucatán. My Maya consultants' ancestors tended to flee colonial communities and keep as much to themselves as they could in the deep forest. Why emphasize the Days of the Dead, what some Maya call *janal pixano'ob*, the dead eat, when you exhume, shelter, venerate, care for, and feed your dead whenever you feel appropriate throughout the year? My Maya consultants do not exhume their dead for lack of land, as there is often plenty adjacent to their cemetery to more than multiply its size. My Maya friends demonstrated perplexed expressions, as if I thought them stupid, when I broached Redfield and Villa Rojas's suggestion that lack of land prompts the Maya to exhume their dead. My Maya consultants have told me in various manners that bodies are exhumed because they have "*cheen taajac te pibóo jee u beita u s'aaba maatun metic k'aas*," that is, "cooked long enough in the

pib, earth-oven, and are now ready to serve." According to Redfield and Villa Rojas, the Days of the Dead in Chan Kom were composed of "domestic ritual, in which each family recalls and propitiates its own dead; and most families are careful to observe it, for then the dead do not trouble the living."[57] I would add that there was probably a dual purpose to these acts of reciprocation mentioned for the Chan Kom villagers, as the Maya tend to ask or manipulate their dead into helping them with practical matters. The rationale for sheltering, caring for, and venerating the ancestors is not excusive to my Maya consultants and has been documented for the K'iche' Maya as well.[58]

Most of the Maya villages where I conduct ethnographic research have small cemeteries that are approximately thirty-by-thirty feet and have population sizes averaging approximately fourteen hundred people. Because of my respect for my Maya consultants, I will only state here that most of the villages I anonymously refer to are deep in the Quintana Roo forest. The cemeteries in these villages are much too small to hold the accumulative deceased bodies as the generations pass, but their relatively small size is not typically an issue. Village cemeteries remain small because most of my Maya consultants routinely exhume their dead. Three to five years after burial a *sujuy sak nook'*, unused white cloth, is taken to the cemetery, and the bones of the dead, with an emphasis placed on the long bones and skull, are taken from the grave. The bones are cleaned, wrapped, fed, placed in a container, and taken home. My Maya consultants are happy at this point to take the bones home for awhile, take care of them, and feed them. Note that by feeding the bones in this context I am referring to the ancestor associated with the bundle.

Once the exhumed remains are wrapped in cloth and taken home, they are placed in a little house, a shrine box, and kept close to or inside the hut. Within days of taking the bundle home, construction begins on a miniature house-shrine that is typically aligned along one of the inside walls of the village cemetery. There is no codified time as to how long the deceased's bones should be kept in the family hut, and the practice varies from home to home. There is some disagreement amongst my main Maya consultants as to whether the now-bundled bones should eventually be returned to the cemetery. There are three important reasons my Maya consultants usually decide to return the bones of their ancestors to the village cemetery. First, authorities at the municipal level, following state guide lines, demand that human bones must be stored within cemetery walls. Second, itinerant Roman Catholic priests sometimes rail against the keeping at home of what they perceive a heretical object, for in

their view, human bones should be kept in ossuaries or cemeteries. Third, the villagers often see an extended keeping of a bone bundle at home as highly suspicious. Suspicious how, exactly? Human bones, as will be elaborated below, are the source of wind beings that affect humans in various ways.

Recognizing, Understanding, and Practicing Maya World Views

The best way to partly understand bundling is to participate in the process. I have made several consecutive mistakes when helping to bundle bones. My first mistakes were in assuming that I would be desacralizing the bones if I did not wash, that is, purify, my hands before handling them and take on a deeply respectful demeanor in conducting what I interpreted as *sacred* work, this, while my Maya companions were doing neither of the above and were instead raucously opening a case of beer to liven up the proceedings as well as the person being disinterred. Another mistake was my trying to completely cover what I took to be the *sacred* femur with the *sacred* cloth before placing it in the *sacred* box. The perplexed looks I received, while I gingerly and carefully covered the femur were not of gratitude for my respectful manner but because of their misunderstanding and impatience. In retrospect I should have known better. I should have observed and followed by example. Since I had only been coming into these villages for five years at that point, though, this was simply not enough to get a good handle on my Maya consultants' world view.

Bundling is a variable practice within Maya world views in terms of respect. More than one Mayanist colleague has commented to me that contemporary Maya religiosity has obviously degenerated because their informants lack a deep awe and respect when they conduct their rituals. This apparent irreverence is the very same behavior I mentioned in the preface to this work as being so confusing to me. What we may see as lack of devotion or respect is simply practical behavior and action within world views that remain strikingly different from our Western anticipations. Bundling is complete when those participating in this action end its production mode. Many a funerary bundle in Maya village cemeteries, in fact, is seen with bones sticking out or with their cloth simply placed under the bones (fig. 6.4); regardless, my consultants still perceive them as bundled. Bundling happens through Maya ritual production, and this need not coincide with my material sense-based logic of what a bundle should be or look like.

Communicating bundles, crosses, and other such objects or structures, according to my j'meen mentor, have a noncorporeal being or beings *k'aax*



figure 6.4: Mayan Funerary Bundles.
PHOTOGRAPH BY BRADLEY RUSSELL.

na'ach' (tethered closely to them). By tethering he means that these entities are loosely tied and not permanently fixed or anchored. These noncorporeal personal beings have their own character, grow old, can gain or lose ritual potency, are capable of positive and negative behavior, can be lustful, are fickle, and can become ill and unresponsive. Communicating object-associated noncorporeal beings are humanlike persons that are sentient and thus need to be sheltered, clothed, fed, and in every which way taken care of. Some of my Maya consultants typically, for these reasons, do not allow a sick human to come into close proximity of communicating objects. I have witnessed several Maya consultants deliberately move their green cross or other such type of communicating object out of a hut where a sick person is residing, even if just suffering from a sour stomach and therefore flatulent, to protect these nonhuman persons. Note that this practice is directly opposite that of Roman Catholicism, where ill people are deliberately put into direct contact with sacred objects.

Nonhuman persons associated with communicating objects are known to be voyeurs, and caution is taken not to engage in sexual intercourse in their presence. The j'meeno'ob who often communicate with these objects abstain

from sexual activity for certain periods lest these beings smell the sex on them and become aroused, envious, and thus difficult to control. The Chan Kom Maya were known to keep small boxes or build separate hut shrines to protect these objects in case of these predicaments.[59] My consultants tend to either build a shrine adjacent to their home or an enclosed shrine within their hut to protect and control these nonhuman persons. As my mentor has told me, "*¿Yaan u kanantaa e krus ti e k'oojananiloob bik k'oojanchajac in santo? Mix in k'at kaa kimik in nooch tata kaaten*," that is, "I need to protect the cross. What if my saint gets sick? I don't want my grandfathers [ancestors] to die twice." Communicating objects function and are used in much the same manner as funerary bundles. While communicating crosses are similar to communicating stones, they are also a type of bundle. Clothed crosses are so much like bundles that they are often seen as their surrogates. For example, once it is decided that the time has come to take a funerary bundle to the cemetery, one can opt at that point, although one can do this later as well, to have a surrogate take its place in or adjacent to the home.

The creating and placing of a surrogate for a bundle is done if so desired only if the family has the knowledge or is familiar with someone who knows how to do this. Note that bundles with human remains are not automatically considered communicating objects or ancestors. Who is an ancestor or what constitutes a communicating object all depends on context. For example, just like a rock is often just a rock, then so is a bundle sometimes just a bundle, and a cross just a cross, unless a relationship is generated between one of these objects and another person. Depending on circumstance, humans or beings associated with an object can initiate the relationship. When an object does become a surrogate for a funerary bundle, the proxy object is placed in the house or an adjacent shrine. Chan Kom wooden crosses, apparently for the above reasons, were housed in minishrines.[60] If an ancestral being is to be associated, that is tethered, to a cross already present in the home, then a shroud is placed over the cross if bare or placed over an existing shroud if already so covered. The cross objects some of my Maya consultants keep in shrines or on home altars are capable of communicating, then, because they serve as a proxy for the noncorporeal ancestor.

Funerary bundles are taken to their cemetery minishrines, and Maya crosses then serve as surrogate bundles through which one or several ancestors may communicate. Just as the dead are shrouded and kept in boxes so are other types of communicating objects.[61] My Maya consultants tend to emphasize the

bundling of the skull and long bones where they say the *pixano'ob*, soul-like person(s), tend to concentrate. Small bones are sometimes indiscriminately left or tossed aside in their burial soil and often wind up reburied in the fill of another grave. The smaller bones tend not to be emphasized because they disintegrate rather easily and are harder to pull intact from the soil. The practice of exhumation is done because of my consultants' views regarding the significance of bones. My lay Maya consultants tend to explain the reasons for exhumation and bundling on a somewhat unclear level. The main reason given is that the dead remain among the living, and one should take care of them so they assist when needed and do not bother when not needed.

Crosses and bundles apparently tend to be much the same in conception both temporally and spatially for the Maya area. No other scholar has linked ancestors to the religious and socioeconomic world of the Maya as thoroughly as McAnany.[62] From 1000 BC to the early sixteenth century, the Maya of the Yucatán Peninsula and Guatemalan highlands interred their ancestors under floors of their houses, in residential shrines, and within large funerary pyramids in the center of their cities and villages. Through the creation of a genealogy of place, the dead were not forgotten but sewn culturally into the landscape. The veneration and reciprocation with ancestors in ancient Maya society was not just an elite practice but was in effect a behavior that cut across all sectors of nobles and commoners.[63] In direct correlation with this practice is the Formative Maya Period appearance of funerary vessels with the quadripartite motif, as specifically discussed in chapter 2.[64] Ancient burials with missing or extra bones may have been related to ancestor veneration and the creation of bundles.[65] I reiterate that the presence of quadripartite images in funerary context links ancestral beings to physically live humans who venerate them. The creation, depiction, and function of communicating bundles have been extensively demonstrated throughout Mesoamerica,[66] sometimes in association with caves.[67] Ancestral communicating bundles, furthermore, are also known for other northern Native American peoples.[68] In addition, also known for northern Native Americans are cruciform images linked to the sun, fire, the four world directions,[69] rain and corn,[70] and quadrilateral burial structures.[71]

Assumed deities in Mesoamerica are often linked to guarded, wrapped ancestral bundles[72] and may, in effect, be aggrandized mythohistorical ancestors whose personal identity became legendary and blurred over time.[73] Significant here is a crosscultural comparison where Jones mentions that human remains and their accumulations often "appear to have undergone fragmentation and

reordering, often to create composite persons, at a later stage in the mortuary process."[74] The practice of exhumation and bundling bones in shrouds is visible during the Late Postclassic archaeological record at the site of Mayapán. Household clusters outside Mayapán's ceremonial center have ministructures with diving entities that appear related to household shrines and agricultural rites, as exhibited at the site of Tulum.[75] Further, Mayapán has miniature house shrines, like those at Postclassic Tulum,[76] that were apparently built to house ancestors and substitute in small-scale for larger structures typically associated with their affiliation and commemoration.[77] Miniature stone houses are also known at the Classic site of Copán, and these shrines have glyphs that mark their function as being that of lineage commemoration.[78]

The housing of ancestral bundles is a widely spread, though difficult to detect, ancient Maya practice. I speculate that perhaps the 30-centimeter square niches found sunk into the inner walls of Structure 23 at Yaxchilán, which is divided into small rooms with benches, may have served as bundle receptacles, especially since this structure is home to Lintels 24 and 25 that depict ancestor communication.[79] Taube, in addition, has mentioned something similar for the vessel-like cache niches at Holmul's "Building B."[80] Indirect evidence demonstrating ancestor veneration is perhaps indicated by the contextual presence of incensarios being placed at the base of stelae, suggested previously as indexical stone bundles, or within mini-houses, such as those at Mayapán and Tulum. Some incensarios, in similar fashion to stelae although smaller and manufactured of ceramic, may in fact portray ancestors.[81] These ancestors appear to have individual character traits and may have served as bundle surrogates or substitutes.

The appearance and function of Maya bundles or images described above seem superficially similar to the European cult of the saints.[82] So what are the differences between the two practices? The differences are to be found in indigenous conception. McGee, for example, admits something quite telling for Lacandon incense burners, which reminds me of Thompson saying that "pantheon" as "the idea of a general assembly of gods finds no place in Maya theology." McGee says:

> The Lacandon have been called idolaters because of their use of god pots, which is incorrect because they do not worship the incense burners. The god pots are neither believed to be actual gods nor considered accurate representations of the gods. Instead, to the contrary, they are an abstract model of a human being, and the medium through which an offering is

> transmitted . . . The Lacandon god pot serves a function similar to that described by Vogt for crosses among the Zinacantecan Maya.[83]

Similar to this, Beals stated for the Western Mixe that the "use of the term 'gods' has often concealed the fundamental character of the spirits involved."[84] Early on, in addition, Morley and Brainerd noted that "there is no evidence to indicate that the Classic Maya worshipped images."[85]

Our knowledge concerning ancient Mesoamerican conceptions of their surroundings is incomplete. I note, however, that there is overwhelming evidence indicating the interrelational and codependent character of these peoples with their material culture as well as the surrounding ecology. The archaeological record of Mesoamerica demonstrates that these ancient peoples often interacted with objects, structures, and landscapes as if they were sentient beings. Ancient Mesoamerican concepts regarding the material and nonmaterial do not seem so much analytical as relational and experiential. Relational practices are still seen in the world views of many traditional Mesoamerican indigenes. The most basic differences between Roman Catholic and Maya concepts are found at the core of their world views; many of these differences are to be seen in their relation to effigies and their associated attributes.

Of Maya Sujuy Sak Nook'o'ob and Roman Catholic Holy Veils

Do any of the various Christian sects, excluding Roman Catholic varieties found in indigenous African or American communities that appear more non-Western than Christian, offer alcoholic drinks to their saints, the Blessed Mother, or Jesus Christ?[86] Alcohol is clearly present in Roman Catholic and Anglican churches; however, the presence of this intoxicant is relegated to the transubstantiation ritual during the sacred Eucharist ceremony. The presence of alcoholic wine during the mass is specifically constricted to the communion with Christ by the ritual sharing of his flesh, through the sacred wafer, and the drinking of sacred red wine as his blood. Note here that I have never witnessed, in my personal devotion or in conducting research, in either Anglican or Roman Catholic services, the priest, rector, or congregation giving any of their sacred idols or images alcoholic beverages. When Roman Catholics are venerating their saints they do so in accordance to their dogma. In their pleading to the saints, these in turn are thought to relay their prayers to the Holy Trinity-composed Godhead on their behalf. Roman Catholic saints are therefore considered sacred intermediaries

that reside in heaven. Maya concepts regarding caring of ancestors, however, is not based on similar orthodox theological doctrine as that noted above for Roman Catholics.[87]

The Spanish contact-period Maya are noted for having shrouded their dead; inserted their partly burned remains within hollow wooden statues placed in family oratories where they were venerated, sheltered, and fed; or both.[88] In a passage from the *Chilam Balam of Chumayel*, for example, a boy is asked, "Son, go bring me The Bones of your father That you buried three years ago. I have a great desire That they be seen."[89] This statement is phrased within Maya epistemologies, in that buried human corpses are likened to their being cooked in a *pib* (earth oven). I previously mentioned that my Maya consultants offer cosmologically significant rationales for their exhumation practices. Burials are indexical ovens where each passing year is likened to one hour of real-time cooking. For example, after approximately three to four hours of slow cooking in an earth oven, depending on the animal flesh and its preparation, the meat readily falls off the bone; for burials, in comparison, it usually takes three to four years for clean bones. My Maya consultants wrap their dead in a sujuy sak nook,' unused white cloth, and this cloth is sometimes described using the Spanish word of sudario. My j'meen consultants tend to describe this cloth as simply *u nook'il u te'ep'el kimen*, that is, cloth that covers the corpse, and in effect, this is understood in Spanish as either *mortaja* or sudario, both meaning shroud.

The historical use of the word sudario by the Maya is unclear. Perhaps the use of the word sudario is somehow linked to the Roman Catholic practice of draping statues and crucifixes with linen during the annual sacred period of Lent. I have, however, never witnessed any Roman Catholic crucifixes or idols wearing a death shroud. Lent is calculated to extend back for forty days, not including Sundays, from Resurrection Sunday. Churches like the Eastern Orthodox, the Church of England, and the American Episcopalian tend to commemorate the crucifixion and death of Christ on Good Friday. On Good Friday the church covers the altar and epitaphion, the encased representation of Christ's burial, in black cloth. Many Good Friday evening services conclude with this draping of black cloth over the cross. Lenten customs are also often accompanied by a loop-type draping of sacred Christian images with a usually blue to purple, but sometimes white, scarflike holy veil.[90]

Roman Catholic and Anglican Lenten veils are used, in varying degrees, to drape crosses, crucifixes, statues, and images in order to add visual substance during this period based on the material exhibition of penance. The sacred veil



figure 6.5:
Cross-Banded Cloth Bound Stela. Copan Peccary Skull
ART GENERATED BY THE AUTHOR AFTER STUART (1996:156).

is referred to in English as the Holy Cloth or Linen and in Spanish as el Santo Lino. The Holy Linen is a thin, scarflike cloth draped over the horizontal bar of the cross or crucifix that creates a hanging loop at midpoint of the vertical staff (fig. 4.8).[91] There may be a historical link between the Lenten Holy Veil and the Maya sujuy sak nook' that is unknown to me, but I have not come across any physical or functional resemblance between the two. Conservative indigenous Maya and Roman Catholic practice is not the same. There are several links between the contemporary Maya bundling of their dead and the practices of their ancestors. As I mentioned previously, glyphs on stelae depicting rulers and quad motifs were erected and clothed during certain ancient rituals. These glyphic accounts describe these rituals as a sort of cross-banded stone binding, as depicted, for example, in a quatrefoil associated with ancestors on a peccary skull found in Copán's Tomb 1 (fig. 6.5).[92] My Maya consultants not only still bundle monoliths but also associate them with ancestors, other communicating objects, and rain patrons.

Maya Winds as Personal Beings

Bundles my Maya consultants create are considered powerful, that is, ritually potent, and for this reason once bound are not to be reopened except with caution. Certain j'meeno'ob, who are deemed quite knowledgeable and skilled are rumored to open bundles with ease. The opening of Maya bundles, containing bones and other objects, is usually done in secret since the typical objective in doing this is to manipulate the bundle's tethered wind person.[93] Villagers have more than a few times questioned me about my interest in and visits to their cemeteries; research is not a good enough or well-understood answer, as my type of labor is not work to them. My kind of work makes me seem in their eyes a *jooykep maak*, lazy man, hanging around the village asking stupid questions. Within that context, I have been asked point-blank if I am training to be a *chingón*, kick-ass, j'meen. That villagers I barely know should ask such direct questions of me voices their understandable concerns. Why else would I spend so much of my time with their j'meeno'ob while at the same time be so interested in cemeteries and their quadlike talking bundles, crosses, trees, and stones?

The point of the uncharacteristic direct questions the villagers posed to me from time to time was to know whether I knew how, or was learning how, to ritually open bundles. Knowing how to ritually open bundles means that I would be able to go beyond what many of them do when they venerate their ancestors. Venerating the ancestors means one reciprocates in order to cajole, persuade, or indirectly manipulate on an interrelational basis. These actions for my Maya consultants are similar to what humans do with one another in our daily social dramas. To evoke in order to manipulate is the one-sided control of a nonhuman person or persons by the human producing such a ritual, that is, what we would categorize as sorcery. The villagers asking me about this are clearly concerned; they are wary of my learning such skills. Wind persons, in the world view of my Maya consultants, are often linked to illness, as they can do their harm unseen and leave little to no evidence of their presence.

Many Maya villagers reciprocate with their ancestors in order to mediate with their windlike presence lest these cause illness in the home and village. Roys, for example, mentions that Maya j'meeno'ob have certain knowledge concerning the quadripartite directional disease causing *iik'o'ob*, winds, and the medicinal flora found within their corresponding earth directions.[94] J'meeno'ob arrive at this knowledge with the help of nonhuman persons who communicate with them through wooden crosses painted green. Note that these nonhuman persons are not helping spirits or companions *mounted* in soul journeys

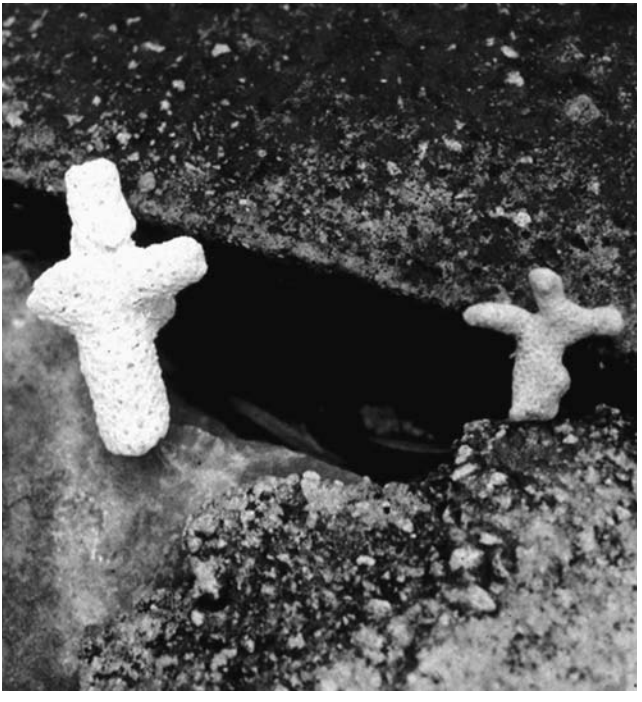


figure 6.6: Mayan Communicating Coral Crosses. PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR.

as in Siberian shamanism. A variety of nonhumans communicate through material objects with those humans who have the knowledge to do so. Besides green crosses, some of my Maya consultants keep similar objects made of coral (fig. 6.6) and speleothem pieces. These small communicating objects are typically kept in miniature blue-green boxes. Are Maya communicating crosses, stelae, coral, stalactites, stones, trees, and so forth all-powerful? Definitely not; even the Chaako'ob rain patrons or Itzamná, for my one consultant that mentioned him, can be manipulated.

Not What but Who: Mesoamerican Nonhuman Persons

I mentioned in my descriptions of some Maya rituals, for example those related to pilgrimage during k'atun intervals in chapter 5, that *Chilam Balam of Chumayel* legends focus on stone pillars associated with ancestors, botanical life, and winds.[95] Other Maya communicating objects related to migrations and pilgrimage are the K'iché lineage-based *pizom k'ak'al* ancestral bundles.[96] Bundles for the Highland Maya are also known to be associated with ancestral

airlike beings that if ritually unchecked can cause illness.[97] This is in part one of the primary reasons indigenous Mesoamericans continue to care about and maintain relationships with their dead. This is also why my Maya consultants consider it prudent to call forth invisible forest, cave, and rain persons during ritual and feed them while they are controlling them, rather than having them show up unexpectedly of their own accord. These objectives point to direct and indirect manipulation of nonhuman persons.

Contemporary Mesoamerican cosmologies tend to center around the propitiation of nonhumans associated with agricultural cycles related to the annual seasons.[98] The Maya refer to forest beings, agricultural patrons dwelling throughout the countryside, as the *yuumil k'aaxo'ob*, forest lords. Forest lords, including the maize patron and the rain-and-thunder–associated Chaak, were some of the most important pre-Columbian Maya cosmological beings.[99] The high importance placed on forest lords is evident by their association with the cornfield that in turn gives and sustains life for the Maya. Pointing to the importance of the sky and forest beings is their transformed survival despite the fall of Classic Maya rulership and the later Spanish conquest.[100] The traditional Maya of today continue venerating these beings and often use clay images, incense burners, ancient artifacts, and speleothem pieces during their related agricultural rituals.[101] Gann and Thompson reported that their contemporary Maya had ritual objects, like those mentioned above, that were at times "endowed with life, and live and move, dance, eat, and drink just like mortals."[102] This apparently describes the j'meeno'ob Maya ritual intercessors' activation and communication of *k'uxan*, live, objects.

During activation, my j'meeno'ob consultants do not believe they are literally bringing an inanimate object to life. Their objective is to summon particular beings, likened and spoken of as if family members, to specific locations where these entities are sometimes tethered onto a specific location or object for feeding during ritual reciprocation.[103] López Austin has described similar reciprocities for central Mexico, saying, "The agency of individuals creates and sustains others . . . Power is acknowledged to be in all beings and transformation is a fundamental component of being."[104] Significantly, Nash mentions that many "precontact Maya 'deities' were literally called 'elder brother,' 'second brother,' and 'our grandmother.'"[105] Sahagún similarly documented that the México spoke of what he considered "deities" as if human, in kinship terms, and as multidimensional beings.[106] The practice of Native Americans in referring to nonhuman persons in kinship terms is extremely widespread. Little differentiation appears

throughout the indigenous Americas in the conceptualizing and calling forth of ancestral beings, be it from grand structures, indexical birthing places, or through ritual objects.

Mischievous, humanlike wind persons are often seen to cause harm to individuals in traditional Mesoamerican communities.[107] Many of my Maya consultants regard air movement as caused by pixano'ob, airlike persons of the dead, which take the form of wind. These wind persons freely roam the sky, ground, and inner earth and can be friendly, unfriendly, or inimical depending on their mood.[108] What exactly is air in our Western conception of it? Do the answers science give suffice to explain an ever so slight breeze or sudden gust of wind that comes and goes as quickly as it came? From where do these sudden air changes emerge? My Maya consultants associate winds that bring rains with the Chaako'ob rain patrons, for they are windlike in many ways and this is the medium by which they travel. Humans are personal beings tethered to flesh and bones so can they too travel by air? Yes, they can and do. What we call human in my Maya consultants' world view is no different from any other invisible personal being. The difference in personal being is what the makeup, what we often gloss as a soul, of such an entity is associated with or tethered to. A material and nonmaterial dichotomy does not apply here. Humans are invisible personal beings but momentarily tethered onto physically visible bodies composed of flesh and bones. Some of my Maya consultants state that the air containing pixano'ob resides in skeletal remains.[109] The essence of these pixano'ob beings, as will be explained below, is thought to be ejaculated by a male's sexual organs and is therefore linked to fertility.

Maya Skeletal Semen: Fertility and Regeneration

Bones are often used in Maya fertility–based, reciprocal ancestor rituals because according to indigenous epistemologies, human, animal, and plant bones contain seedlike regenerative properties. Let us look briefly at how regeneration is conceptualized within myth and practice in the Kiché Mayan epic the *Popol Vuh*. In this early colonial text, which reads as follows, the head of a character named Hun Hunaphu is placed in the fork of a barren calabash tree: "And when his head was put in the fork of the tree, the tree bore fruit. It would not have had any fruit, had not the head of One (Hun) Hunaphu been put in the fork of the tree."[110] In analogous form, from the nearby but contemporary Tz'utujil Maya, Prechtel and Carlsen depict a back-strap loom tied around a tree in which a Maya

head straddles its fork or cleft, signifying that textile production is likened to a sexual process (fig. 6.7).[111] Furbee, furthermore, has noted that the contemporary Tojolabal Maya communicating Lomantán icon is claimed to have been born from the crotch, the fork or cleft, of a tree.[112] These heads within clefts in trees, implicitly or explicitly—depending upon your sexual particulars—index double sexual metaphors in a variety of ways.

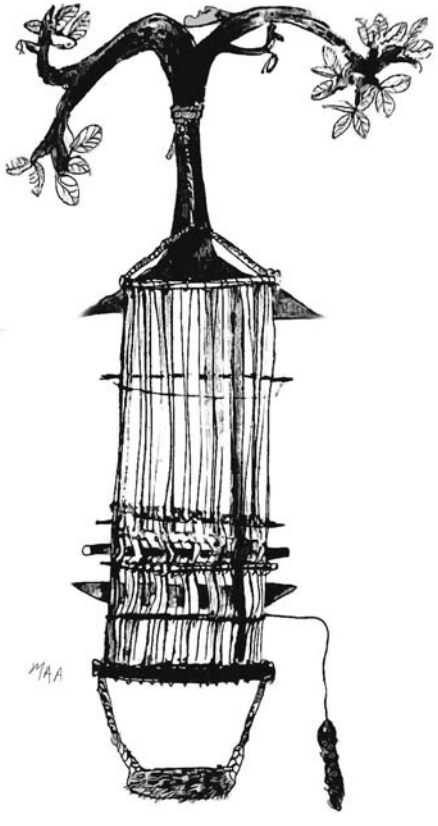


figure 6.7:
Head in Cleft of Tribranched Tree.
ART GENERATED BY THE AUTHOR AFTER PRECHTEL AND CARLSEN (1988:125).

I mention elsewhere that in the *Popol Vuh* passage noted above, the fertility and sexual overtones of the fork in the tree are coupled by the tree standing in or by a ball court's road, that is, the court's slope-sided playing field.[113] As Schele and Mathews noted, the K'iche' Mayan term for ball court, *hom*, also means crevice.[114] Mesoamerican ball-court structures are often cleftlike shaped, and the crotches, clefts, forks of the trees, and center playing fields of ball courts appear to index females' vaginal openings. The center field of ball-game courts, with their sometimes strategically placed central and circular marker, can easily be interpreted as metaphorical entrances into the female earth, just as caves and cenote sinkholes are also points of origin or birth. As noted above, some Maya view their back-strap-loom weaving production process, strapped on one end to the back of a woman and the other around a tree or wooden post, as likened to sexual movements, conception, and birth.[115] Ideas concerning indexical clefts, fertility, and humans pertain not only to Maya world views but are also part of larger, Native American-wide cosmological concepts.

Throughout pre-European-contact Native America, there existed, and to a certain degree still exists, the cosmogonic concept that certain human lineages originated from orifices in the female earth. According to Furst, the Wixárika-Huichols are known to refer to a "V-shaped pass with sloping sides covered by cactus and other desert vegetation . . . [as] 'Doorway of Elder Sister in her Proper Place' . . . meaning that here one enters the vagina of the Peyote Mother."[116] Points of origin are variably similar and can be water sources, caves, either natural or man-made, or small, man-made, closed-off circular holes like Southwestern kivas and sipapus. As mentioned previously, there are many differences amongst Native American groups, both temporal and spatial, but these traditions overlap in identifiable core elements and key metaphors. This is especially true as concerns Native Americans continual relations with ancestral beings and other nonhuman persons. One such entity is the central Mexican culture hero known as Quetzalcoatl, which is a wind being composite associated with snakes and birds and by extension the earth and sky. Some legends concerning Quetzalcoatl tell of his entering the underworld through an earth orifice in order to retrieve ancestral human bones. Quetzalcoatl, in order to accomplish this task, must travel around the underworld four times before the ancestral bones are given to him. Quetzalcoatl, once possessing these bones, proceeds to Tamoanchan, the place of origin where he entered, exits, and goes to see Cihuacoatl, serpent woman, who grinds the bones into a cornlike meal. Blood is then dripped into the bone meal and mixed to fashion humans.[117] The central Mexican myths describing the origin of humans from cornmeal are similar to that in the Kiché Mayan *Popol Vuh*, where Xmucane similarly fashions human beings from corn she has ground.[118] Transformed over time, yet retaining core indexical content, the cosmologies of some central Mexican Nahuas continue to conceptualize human flesh and blood as if corn derived. For central Mexican Nahuas corn is like their blood, as it likewise is for many contemporary Maya.[119]

Some of my j'meeno'ob consultants say that males ejaculate the corn essence of humans in their semen. This essence is thought of as a kind of white skeletal matter. This semenlike skeletal matter is linked to corn gruel *saka'*, white water, drunk at both ancient and contemporary Maya rituals.[120] My Maya consultants ritually served three types of corn gruel: saka,' which is semiground corn mixed with water; *k'eyem*, which is similar to saka' but to which is often added a little salt, chile, or both; and *aak' sa'*, which is exclusively made from soft, unripened green corn. All three corn gruels are somewhat likened to human semen, but it is the very glutinous, glistening, and somewhat tart green-corn gruel that is highly

semenlike in quality. One of my consultants has under his breath tauntingly joked to me, when the aak' sa' gets ritually served, "*tun taal le sa'il keep u bakal*," that is, "Here comes the corn-bone semen." Bakal is deployed here as a double entendre since it is the stiff corncob, likened to bone, from which are scraped the milk-like squirting kernels.

I shall now return to Hun Hunaphu's skull in the ball-court tree. I note elsewhere[121] that, in the *Popol Vuh*, Hun Hunaphu's decapitated yet living skull is capable of *spitting* saliva: an indexical ejaculation of skeletal semen that later impregnates Xquic.[122] Note the significance of the indexed sexual encounter between Hun Hunaphu's white-bone skeletal material and Xquic: Hun Hunaphu spits, ejaculates, into Xquic's palm as she holds her hand out to take his metaphoric saliva. Xquic's hand and palm here are a highly charged sexual metaphor for her vagina, as both are capable of extracting and accepting a male's ejaculation, in this case that of Hun Hunaphu's head in the tree. Hun Hunaphu is skeletal bone matter at this point. He is not literally dead, though, but transformed into a different sort of personal being. Maya world views, as explained earlier, center around life and death as forms of being that blend and complement each other as if in a regenerative dance.

The disturbance, disinterment, and common practice of the bundling of craniums and long bones are notoriously known but not well explained for the Maya or any other Native American peoples.[123] Artifacts capable of putting these practices in context stem from the site of Tikal, Guatemala. Tikal, like every Mesoamerican city, it seems, has many burial-context vessels with the quad-cross motif prominently displayed (fig. 6.8). In addition, for Tikal, we have the greenstone mask of Lord K'uk' Ahau, which has the typical open communicating mouth of other funerary masks, as well as a prominent quad-cross motif in the shape of a sproutlike regenerating man (fig. 6.9).[124] Adding further weight to my hypothesis throughout this work is Tikal's Altar 5 (fig. 6.10). This altar has a string of glyphs on its ring and panels and is commonly agreed to depict ruler Hasaw Chan K'awil with a nobleman from the city of Kalakmul on his left. On the ground between the two men is the exhumed skeleton of a deceased wife of Hasaw, with the dead wife apparently being related to the Kalakmul noble.

The text on Altar 5 has been read as telling the retrieval of the bones of Hasaw's wife from within a territory that is an enemy of Tikal. The retrieval of the bones is assumed to have been done in order to save her remains from desecration at the hands of Tikal's enemies, yet nothing specific as to the reason for their retrieval is mentioned in the texts.[125] The glyphs indicate that the



figure 6.8:
Tikal Cross Motif Vessel. Tikal Site Museum.
PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR.

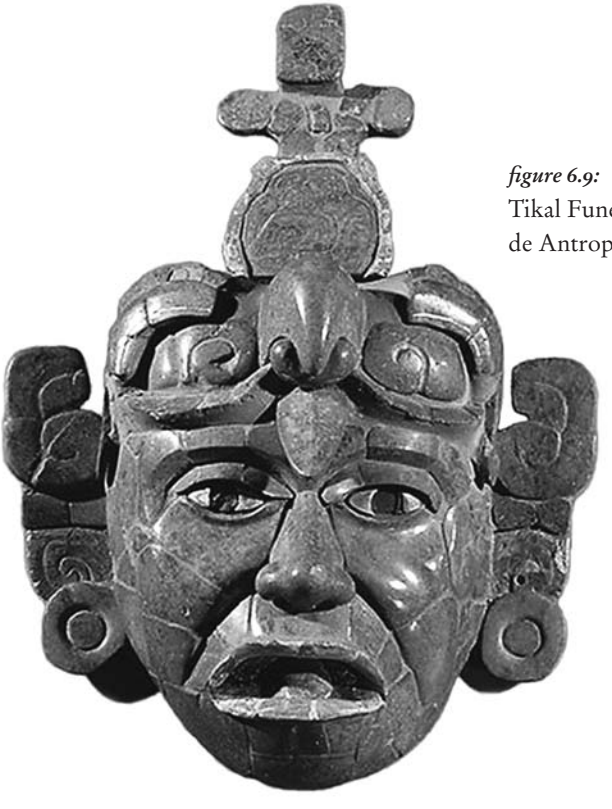


figure 6.9:
Tikal Funerary Mask 160. Museo de Antropologia, Guatemala.



figure 6.10:
Tikal Altar V.
ART GENERATED BY THE AUTHOR AFTER HARRISON (1999:139).

actions involve the retrieval of her remains within eight years after her death. On the ground, her bones appear to be piled in a quadrant with the skull resting at dead center. The personage from Kalakmul, with crossed bones on his hat, looks toward Lord Hasaw, who menacingly holds an upraised knuckle-duster as if toward the bones. Note that the knuckle-duster has lightly visible quad-cross motifs and this event is linked to the closing of a k'atun celebration. Why so much trouble and fuss over bones about which these inscriptions are not totally clear? Furthermore, the woman apparently is not Hasaw's primary wife. While little is described in these inscriptions concerning the activities depicted here, what is understood is that the woman's bones and these two men's relationship to them were extremely important.

What happened to the bones depicted on Altar 5 after their retrieval and the completion of k'atun fourteen, according to the inscription on this altar and its associated Stela 16? Although Cache 32 under Stela 16 was looted, some bones were found under the monolith during excavation. Were these the same bones depicted on Altar 5? The exhumation of the woman's bones is clearly related to the closing of k'atun fourteen, for otherwise this would not be contextually mentioned both on the altar and its associated stela. The answer I suggest lies in

other Maya actions related to burials and the disinterment, moving, or curing of bones. The Maya, as mentioned previously, venerated their dead and kept some of them in shrines for use as communicating objects. Mesoamerican bundles, effigies, or both are known to have been kidnapped from enemy sites, not for desecration, but as a sort of hostage to apparently manipulate foes and their ancestors. The woman's exhumation as depicted on Altar 5 was a very important production. This event cannot be understood as exceptional or exclusive of other Maya activities, however, except that Lord Hasaw saw fit to memorialize his actions in stone and in connection to the fourteenth k'atun-closing ceremony. Hasaw's deceased wife was apparently connected to the k'atun closing and thus her presence was required even after death. Her bones had to be retrieved even if her remains were within enemy territory, as her participation in this k'atun event demanded as much.

The ancient practice of exhuming bodies for reciprocal ritual, although commemorated in stone by the wealthy, was not only an elite activity. Disinterment was important and widespread enough that it has continued up to the present in various regions of indigenous Mesoamerica. The ancient Maya seemed to link their living ancestors to quadripartitioning and its signifier icon the cross-like motif. This ancient practice is not extinct. I have extensively documented in this chapter that some contemporary Maya continued their ancestors' practice of creating skeletal bundles.[126] The linking of quad-cross motifs to communicating bones and stones is not exclusive to the contemporary Maya; it is also found among today's Nahuas of central Mexico.[127] To reiterate briefly, contemporary Mayan communicating bundles are composed of exhumed partial or complete skeletons wrapped in a sujuy sak nook,' new white cloth, and are often associated with blue-green crosses (fig. 6.1). Maya bundles are sometimes sheltered in home shrines, where they are ritually fed and communicated with, before being placed in the village cemetery.

Bundles can be fed food and drink and communicated at the cemetery or, as is often done, through surrogate objects such as stones or crosses kept in the home altar, shrine, or elsewhere.[128] Communicating bundles and associated objects are apparently no longer reburied; according to my Maya consultants, however, they were up until the recent past, and they speak of villages deeper into the forest where older customs are still practiced. Correlating with my ethnographic data, Becker has mentioned that ancient Maya deposits containing pieces of human bone may have functioned much like caches.[129] Harrison-Buck, furthermore, states that caching activity seems to have taken place at "centralized ritual

spaces."[130] Chapman, through his anthropological model of personhood, states that people need to be understood within their relational totalities. Within his view people are linked to their production, material objects, barter, and consumption. These relational processes establish who people are and as such, the dead, caches (including partial hoards of human bone), and other material culture link people through personal transactions that engage these items.[131] Tikal's Altar 5, mentioned above, implies and demonstrates as much.

Every aspect of pre-European-contact to contemporary, funerary, mummy-bundling ritual, including ritual production, construction, maintenance, and feeding, is in some respect reflective of Mesoamerican world views. Venerating the ancestors in Mesoamerican relational ritual tends to emphasize entreating, beseeching, cajoling, instructing, and threats to ancestral nonhuman persons.[132] These ritual production performances stress the actions of a motivated sponsor or sponsors, for and with nonhumans, called forth to create meaning-making activities that build and strengthen bonds amongst visible and invisible persons.[133] This is demonstrated and implied in the activities commemorated on Tikal's Altar 5 and Stela 16. Native American ancestor-communication performance art through chants, dance, dreams, trance, and offerings is an indigenous American-wide practice. These human actions maintain real and fictive kinship solidarity with personalized nonhumans that exist within the daily behavioral world of Native American peoples.[134]

As stressed in chapter 1, Mesoamerican ritual intercessors, although following patterns and conventions, do not have a strictly codified religious practice in a Western sense.[135] Theological rules, codes, and guidelines are conspicuously absent in Mayan hieroglyphic inscriptions,[136] as are any codified rules for burial rites or cadaver treatment,[137] and as well as the presence of any centralized religious prophet.[138] As Morrison states, Native Americans did not have Western-equivalent theological concepts before European contact and to a certain extent, depending on degrees of acculturation, many still do not.[139] Ancient Maya cosmological practice appears to pivot around composite beings, composed of foreign and local hybrid attributes, often wrapped in bundles and sheltered in order to be cared for and tended.[140] Since plant life regenerates from death, both are seen as complementary, necessary, and natural. Mayan communicating crosses are transformed ancestral bundles, and Mesoamerican ritual icons are thought of in a relational manner.[141]

For many contemporary Maya, the social orientation of their concept of self, as an embodied person, in relation to other-than-human persons is sometimes

more important than their relations to other humans. I do not here mean to suggest that my Maya consultants see no physical distinction between themselves and their deceased; they are acutely aware of the difference. What my Maya consultants do not tend to see is an inherent discontinuity between the living and the dead or metaphysical differences between what we would consider material and nonmaterial beings. Many of my Maya consultants live in a world where death is not permanent. The dead transform into nonhuman persons that constitute part of my Maya consultants' daily behavioral ecology. My Maya consultants' world views tend to be interrelational and intersubjective, and this discussion is where I focus in the next and final chapter.



figure 7.1: Chalco Quad-Cross.
PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR WITH PERMISSION.

CHAPTER 7

End Discussion

Quadripartitioning and Native American Relational World Views

In Mesoamerica the cross was elaborated, modified, and historically manipulated; further, it crossed geographical boundaries . . . It persisted throughout the entire temporal period of Mesoamerica and functioned as one of the most fundamental symbols in the Mesoamerican visual vocabulary . . . [symbolizing the] complex ideology of this simply formed visual design.

—ANNABETH HEADRICK,
"The Quadripartite Motif and the Centralization of Power"

The diverse and easily confounded symbolism associated with the sun, fire, wind, and the four directions that has occupied most of the scholarly interest in Southern Cult symbolism.

—JAMES A. BROWN,
"Spiro Art and Its Mortuary Contexts"

The complexity of the idea systems involved suggests a widely distributed ideographic system that is distinctly Mesoamerican in character but that takes on local or regional character in peripheral areas. Such a system could be regarded as a world-class ideological entity comparable to Judeo-Christian,

Hindu, or Buddhist worldviews and religions that have crosscut cultures and linguistic boundaries. Just as these patterns of thought and ways of describing the world are unified by core beliefs, diversity within the system through time and space is also characteristic.

— POLLY SCHAAFSMA,
"Tlalocs, Kachinas, Sacred Bundles, and
Related Symbolism in the Southwest and Mesoamerica"

Indexicality, Agency, and Ways of Relating

I PROPOSED AT THE BEGINNING AND AT VARIOUS PLACES throughout this book that ancient to contemporary Mesoamericans are better understood within their indigenous epistemologies. In this final chapter I approach my working conclusions by anchoring myself in the work of two great ethnographers and their respective insights. First, as Turner admitted, "It is perhaps hardly correct to speak of 'secular' and 'sacred' behavior in the ritual field of *Mukanda* . . . The methods of analysis that have become established in anthropology cannot provide adequate constructs to explain the relationships between the interacting factors that determine successive and simultaneous events in a behavioral field of this type."[1] Second, I emphasize Hallowell's endeavor to develop "a frame of reference by means of which it may be possible to view the individual[s] in another society in terms of [his or her culturally constituted perspective of self] . . . which is the integral focus of [their] activities, rather than to content ourselves with the perspective of an outside observer."[2]

The indigenous Americas have elicited confused or surprised expectations from researchers concerning the variety of Native American imagery that links quad-cross motifs to the sun's fire, the earth's winds, seasonal world directions, and the ancestors.[3] Crosslike icons are for us loaded with Christian symbolism that is extremely difficult to disassociate ourselves from even if not devout or practicing in any of its religious sects. I have repeatedly throughout this work tried to avoid using the term "religion." The Latin-derived term of religion as universally applied is never quite convincing, and its typically undefined application tends to distort the actions of non-Western peoples that we strive to understand. In this work I repeatedly and interchangeably use the words cosmology and world view, but how have I been using them? Throughout this work I have deployed world view in accord with Redfield's definition that in nonindustrial societies, what he calls "primitive," "'worldview' refers to the way the world looks to that people, looking

out . . . especially to the way a man, in a particular society, sees himself in relation to all else. It is the properties of existence as distinguished from and related to the self . . . Among whom do I move? What are my relations to things?"[4] In other words, what is the relation of the ego "me," my perception of self-importance, to everyone and everything both seen and unseen as well as touched and untouched? The human understanding of self, and how one speaks about oneself as a subject, is related to the perception of how one functions and *who one is* in terms of more than just an individual biological body. What constitutes a person varies and is culturally constituted.[5] Persons can be visible or invisible, animate or inanimate, or both. Individuals in industrial societies rarely conceptualize and address inanimate objects as if real persons. This does occasionally occur, however. An example is national flags that often get directly looked at and personally engaged while pledged to, are treated gingerly, fought over, and put to rest at the end of their life as if they were living beings.

Material objects can be culturally given a sentient personal life of their own as if, to use Gell's terminology, "distributed persons" with volition and agency.[6] An inert, material-object person can be an index, depending on what it signifies to those who have a culturally defined relationship with it. As noted by Jones, for example:

> In making things people reorder . . . matter in order to serve human purposes. In doing so people are not so much acting on the world but interacting with it . . . All human actions are considered to involve reciprocal rights or responsibilities. This is true of people and interactions between people and things or animals. Because this is so the person . . . exists in a complex of interactive relationships. People are therefore connected by their relationships, and they are also connected to the objects that they have manufactured . . . This connection continues even if the object is exchanged . . . Particular orders of personhood are the result of a specific cosmological engagement between the persons and their environment. In each case the person is produced through the totality of their relationships, with people, with things and with the environment . . . [and] spatial order is seen to have a critical effect upon [such formations].[7]

Understanding ancient indexes is not simple and therefore easily seductive to plain nontheoretical description by labeling everything we do not comprehend as symbolic. López Luján, for example, admits that Postclassic México "offerings

are like sentences . . . But we don't have all the words, and we don't completely understand their sequence, so they're hard to read."[8] How very true. Symbols are not concrete and fixed but subject to reevaluation by those who use them.[9] The dynamic capacities inherent in symbols are multivocality—the capacity of symbols to represent many things at once; multivalentity—the capacity to carry various values or meanings; and polysemousity—the capacity to be open to several meanings. Indexes, however, are different from symbols in that they directly reference culturally contextual subject matter.

Material objects can have transformative indexical capacity because of their manufacturing material, inherent or applied color, and because any images they carry are not likely to be incidental and are therefore indicative of their core signification. These processes, as acted upon through individual practice, give force to material indexical meanings and structural significance as historically played out.[10] Precise indexical associations are not always feasible, but their analysis, by their articulation with people, places, and things, may be possible if there has been extensive indigenous epistemological research contextual to the material culture in question.[11] Holistic documentation, involving archaeological, historical, and ethnographic material, is important because we need to know how a society's individuals, or their descendents, classify and position their indexes in practice. As Brody noted regarding ancient Puebloan material culture:

> Is it possible to approach an Anasazi view of Anasazi art, and if it is, how can we do so? It seems to be that there is only one way. Artistic forms are embedded within layers of history and surrounded by layers of rhetoric, and we must peel away and evaluate all of those layers until the bare, abstract structure of the work is exposed. Abstract qualities are the only parts of the art complex that remain substantially intact through time, across space, and despite overlays of perhaps unrelated cultural and social values and ideologies, which are all that any rhetoric can ever express . . . Anasazi architecture served practical tasks of daily life; it was utilitarian as can be.[12]

This also applies to what meaning people place on material representation and function, that is, their relationship to objects.[13] As Weiner noted for "Papua New Guinea and beyond . . . subject and object are defined only by the relationship itself; in fact, the object passing between people is the relationship . . . [This is] a way of seeing the world which promotes an analysis of the connections or

systems of relations between people and things . . . At an abstract level what we are dealing with are forms of relationality, or ways of relating."[14]

My investigations throughout this work indicate the following main conclusion: the quad-cruciform shape existed in the Americas centuries before European contact, and its core index has been adapted up to the present. According to Guess, "For the indigenous people of the New World, the cross represented the basis of their cosmology, beliefs about the origin and order of their world." She also says, however, that, "no clear documentation survives as to how the indigenous population used the cruciform prior to the conquest."[15] This book is in part a response to Guess. There is a great amount of indigenous documentation, although widely scattered, as to the meaning and use of the pre-European–contact, quad-cruciform icon. Putting together the information, widely scattered both temporally and spatially throughout the Americas, within an ethnoarchaeological synthesis grounded in social theory has not been easy and will surely prove controversial. My hope is that I have at least achieved points to ponder concerning our academically given understandings regarding indigenous American cosmologies.

However controversial my methodologies used in this work may prove to be, they nevertheless hold significant implications for the interpretation and explanation of indigenous Mesoamerican material culture. As mentioned throughout this study, the quad-cross motif in relation to deceased rulers has been dated in the Maya area to at least the Formative period[16] and on through the Classic.[17] At K'axob, Belize, quadripartite icons appear on burial-context ceramic vessels,[18] and according to Headrick these types of bowls were power objects Maya ruler-priests used.[19] The ruler apparently partly held and further reproduced his politico-religious right to rule through ceremonial manipulation of these ritually potent bowls and their imagery. Quadripartite icons as communicating and evocational foci continued through the Postclassic and into the colonial period. Contemporary Mayan communicating crosses have similar significance as ancient quadripartite icons, although transformed, and these continue to guide some of the conservative Maya.[20]

At the Center of Attention: A Relational Sense of Place-Within-Space

Within Maya world views there is a nexus between the regeneration of people and overlapping spiral-type cycles of time within which humans and invisible

beings coexist in experiential relationships. My j'meeno'ob consultants often conceive the center, directional sides, and corners of communities as if in a perpetual cosmological balancing act. The cosmography my Maya consultants tend to interrelate with is an established sense of place-within-space as seen temporally and spatially within a Mesoamerican-wide relational landscape template. The umbilical center of Mesoamerican communities tends to represent the past, present, and future warmth and security of the home while the rural periphery can be somewhat perceived, although not in a binary entirety, as cold and unstable.[21] The center as cast in line with the warmth of the sun, as a multidimensional being, provides a living, dynamic cosmovision that is lived day in and day out with the appearance and disappearance of the sun person and its heat.[22] Mesoamericans tend to embed security and protection of home and community as fundamental to their cosmos in community-related social relations and actions.[23] In adapting Redfield's world-view model as the natives' perception of how their world operates and is structured,[24] however, I suggest that our casting Mesoamerican concepts of center and periphery in strict binary oppositions can be too stringent. Stone, for example, suggests that the "binary spatial model should not be seen, however, as inflexible, as there were gradations and blendings of 'community' and 'wilderness' space."[25]

Strict dichotomies of center and periphery lead one to oppositional binaries that smack of Eliade, where "sacred space [is] encircled by an enormous, chaotic, little-known zone of profane space," whereby secular areas are transformed only when a transcendent reality such as a hierophany, that is, a manifestation of the sacred, has occurred there.[26] Gossen's insight that Chamula Maya cosmology is centered on the sun's seasonal positions that in turn coincide with its waxing and waning heat is highly pertinent here.[27] Before moving forward, I need to add slightly to the brief points I made in chapter 5 concerning indigenous Maya directionality in relation to our north, south, east, and west compass directions. Despite the now-acknowledged importance of the Mesoamerican center, in addition to the other four world directions, it is only relatively recently that researchers began slowly delving deeply into this issue.[28]

Brotherston and Ades, as previously noted, stated that our fixation on the Western compass and cardinal points or both ignores that the Maya place supremacy on the eastern and western horizons and that zenith was regarded as north.[29] Tichy, furthermore, stated that understanding zenith as a primary Maya direction was key in trying to comprehend native directionality concepts.[30]

Landa noted for the colonial contact Maya, as did Pío-Pérez for the later colonial, what I mentioned in chapter 5 for my j'meeno'ob consultants: that the Maya regard the beginning of their ritual day at chuumuk k'iin, which is the sun at zenith or midday.[31] My Maya consultants' rationale in this is obvious when put in practice. Standing next to the j'meen during his production preparations, it is clear that there is leeway as to when he deems it appropriate to begin the ritual day. The concept of chuumuk k'iin is fluid and not dogmatically rigid. Midday may be approaching, dead-on, or slightly past as the j'meen begins addressing the sun person. The difference of where the sun is in terms of midday is in practice of slight technical concern. From the vantage point of the j'meen, or my own, for that matter, we are situated as if at the center of attention for the sun. This is, of course, human projection from where we stand on earth looking upward and not the other way around. From the standpoint of my Maya consultants, however, it is the sun that moves, just like the clouds and wind, and it is its attention, just like that of the rain-giving, male-associated clouds, that they seek in many of their rituals.

Being at the center of attention is often very important, to varying degrees, for many humans, and the ancient to contemporary Maya are no exception. For the ancient Maya the most attention desired was that from personalized, ancestral-lineage-linked noncorporeal beings, wind, rain clouds, and entities in the sky, such as the sun, moon, and planets. No inert being, however, seems to have garnered as much attention from ancient Mesoamericans as did that ball of thermonuclear hydrogen reaction we call the sun. The Maya were little different from many ancient peoples who have sought the sun's caressing warmth or avoided its temperamental heat. Note that our most cherished day of leisure within our own culture is called *Sunday*. For the Maya, in addition, the sun was interlinked to the ancestors and their favors. Both the sun and the coming of the rains were crucial to the regeneration of the earth and humans. The slow shifting of the sun's apparent daily eastern emergence and western disappearance, all within a variety of colors resulting from atmospheric conditions, is truly fascinating to watch. To associate the sun and other astronomical objects with lineage ancestral kin and other nonhuman persons, however, adds another fascinating dimension to the observance of how these celestial bodies move and seem to behave. Being at the center of daily perpetual celestial action was, by all appearances, an understandable obsession of most Native Americans.

Four, Five, Make It Seven World Directions

The differences between our compass directions and the indigenous Mesoamerican sense of directionality are significant.[32] Relying on colonial dictionaries to understand complex indigenous exegesis, although invaluable, does not help much if their definitions are read at face value without taking into consideration their inherent interpretive cultural lens.[33] The ancient Maya were interested in astrology to predict and define their overlapping spiral-like time phenomena as related to social events. Rulers and other administrators were extremely interested in the movement of celestial, kin-associated entities as they were linked to their claims of legitimacy and right to privilege. For Classic Maya rulers the obsession with demonstrating their right to govern is exhibited in their continual association with the sun person and the favors of their ancestors as tied to community place-within-space. Maya rulers, in similar fashion to other Native American administrators, wore the sun and its seasonal movements on their sleeves, as it were. The Classic Maya, both males and females, conspicuously wore clothes, footwear, and held staffs depicting the quad-cross motif and the crossed-bands or both, for example, as amply demonstrated in Yaxchilán's Lintels 9, 14, 15, 17, 24, 25, and 46.[34]

Almost any Classic Maya representation picked at random will have one or more quad motifs and often in various combinations. The ancient Maya continually wanted to declare themselves at the center of celestial motion since they claimed to be kin to the sun and other celestial personalized beings. The revolution of the earth and its orbit around the sun, apparently not perceptible to ancient Maya astronomers, creates what appears to be solar motion and a continual shifting of grouped stars from the point of view of an earthbound observer. For Native American world views, this places these celestial bodies within the categories of persons having agency and volition. Note that I do not assume that precontact Native Americans personified the celestial bodies they observed in the sky. As Hallowell noted for the Ojibwa, "It would be an error to say that the Ojibwa 'personify' natural objects. This would imply that, at some point, the sun was first perceived as an inanimate, material thing."[35] In similar fashion as Turner noted for the Ndembu, I here for the Native Americas "refer to categorical relationships which stress likeness rather than interdependence as the basis for classification."[36] In other words, then, something considered kinlike and personalized with volition and agency does not require it to be personified: it is a ready-made person.

From the point of view of an individual on earth, here being some of my

ak'iino'ob consultants, the motion celestial persons follow occurs along an invisible path, similar to how humans travel on roads, through a line or rope that links them together.[37] We term this invisible line the ecliptic, since eclipses occur, either solar or lunar, when the moon crosses this celestial path running across the sphere of the sky. The ancient Maya did not have to understand physical laws the way modern science does in order to see that these celestial bodies did not move at random. Celestial bodies seem to move as if in tandem, like an organized dance across the sky. Within world views based on relational experience, the repetitive and patterned dance of these ancestral bodies likened to persons was of great significance and not seen as coincidental. During the earth's orbit around the sun, which causes our yearly cycle composed of four seasons, we reach four stations of median and extreme positions in relation to the sun. Median, less extreme, inclinations of the earth in relation to the sun occur twice, first during the vernal equinox on March 21 and second during the autumn equinox on September 23. Maximum, more extreme, inclinations toward the sun occur during the summer solstice on June 21 and maximum inclination facing away from the sun during the winter solstice on December 22. These stations mark our four seasons in relation to the earth's shifting daylight hours, warm and cold temperatures, rain cycles, and of course the regeneration of plants that then affects the reproduction of animals and humans.

The ancient Maya, as all other Native Americans, could not have ignored the stations of the sun as the seasons progressed. We know the Maya kept extremely accurate records of solar cycles as well as of lunar and planetary motions. The seasonal stations of the sun, from the point of view of the earthbound observer, shift along the eastern and western horizon, and this is projected onto the passing elliptical path in the sky.[38] Ancient Native Americans latched onto these seasonal patterns as markers of the sun's regenerative powers as it shifted from equinox to solstice to equinox to solstice and so forth. Seen from where the Maya astrologer-astronomer stood, this creates an abstract rectangular area on earth, demarcated by the wide eastern and western horizons and a long path along the northern and southern horizons, that is reminiscent of the Mesoamerican I-shaped ball court with its end centers.

The east to west directions, as explained in chapter 5, are of primary importance, with north and south being default horizons that run along the sun's ecliptic path. The center of this path is where chuumik k'iin, midday, occurs and during the equinoxes this is right in the middle of the sun's road as seen from where the four directional stations diagonally meet and intersect at

Xokén-Chuumuk Lu'um (middle earth). This causes, in effect, a quadripartitioned earth as cut by abstract diagonals that create four indexical triangular sections (fig. 5.15). This is seen and depicted by the crossed-bands and middle circle that in effect represent the ecliptic (fig. 5.14). Dead center here is relative to where an individual stands as an earthbound observer, not where modern scientific instruments would indicate it would be. Ritual dead center for the Maya can be off-center by our logic, as their concern depends on relations and not on size or distance of degrees from center to periphery. Ritual center is relative to production objective, and ceremonial action here equalizes any disparity. All Maya centers, in accord with this, then, could claim themselves the center of their world, not because they literally were so by our scientific standards, but because they ritually proclaimed it to be so. Furthermore, their ancestors sanctioned and legitimized the claim to central place. The central place-within-space is linked here to birth, death, and regeneration in accordance to their ecological and cosmological surroundings. The central historical place of settlement is the home of the ancestors and the place to set houses for the living.[39]

The ecliptic path as the sky's road upon which the sun traverses along with other celestial bodies is notably depicted in various Maya depictions of rulers being engaged with their ancestors. Epigraphers noted early on that these celestial sky bands contained glyphs signifying the sun, the moon, and various other celestial objects as they move across the ecliptic.[40] The Maya often likened the ecliptic to a snake because of its twisting movement across the sky from seasonal station to station.[41] The word in Mayan for sky, *ka'an*, is practically a homophone with their word for serpent, *kaan*. The ecliptic sky band with its oscillating movements is therefore often iconographically represented as a double-headed snake.[42] Schele's work on Palenque's Tablet of the Cross and its celestial monster and sky band (fig. 2.12) has great significance here.[43] The monster in this imagery is nothing more than an ancestor's skull bowl from which emerges a quadlike tree. As mentioned in chapter 2, this skull has a bowl resting at the top of its head. A crossed-bands glyph, noting the west and the ecliptic, is, in accord with Headrick's insight, depicted x-ray-like within the bowl.[44] The sky band running through the skull, from our left to right, runs along the sun's path from east to west as noted by the cross glyph on our left of the skull to another set of crossed-bands on our right of the skull. The sky band running through the half decomposed skull in effect marks zenith as the midway point between regeneration, when life begins to decompose, only to emerge anew in a cycle observable everywhere in nature.[45]

The right-angle quad motif, although seemingly interchangeable, seems to represent the sun and ancestors at dawn, while the crossed-bands seem to represent the sun and ancestors, as well as ritual execution victims, at sunset. Tonina in Chiapas, for example, has monumental imagery depicting a downward-hanging, disembodied head with sun-rayed feathers cast in the middle of feathered crossed-bands (fig. 7.2). As Freidel, Schele, and Parker note, it seems likely that "many Maya lords exited to the Otherworld tied to it . . . [Nobles likely] died in front of this façade, perhaps on this type of scaffold. This scene links war and the sacrifice of captives to the same mythology and cosmology that guided other Maya affairs of state."[46] Ritual executions the Maya conducted seem to be linked in some ways to the vital warmth of the sun. This vital warmth, connected to what J. Furst calls "spirit power" and "force," circulates about the Native American world. It is, according to her,

> held temporarily by an individual entity, human or otherwise. Without insisting on exact correspondence . . . [it is similar to the] *orenda* of the Iroquois, *wakan* of the Sioux, or *sila* of the eastern Inuit . . . which, like



figure 7.2: Tonina Sun-Rayed Feathered Head in Feathered Crossed-Bands.
PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR.

> the Mexica idea, are sometimes associated with a kind of cosmic breath that enters human bodies in varying quantities and lends differing vital powers . . . It seems to have remained intact . . . Human existence represented a transfer of vital power from the heavens and from warm things, like the sun and fire.[47]

The warmth of human bodies, as well as animals, it seems, could be taken or tapped into through ritual execution and relayed to the sun. The sun then, it seems, was thought to shoot back the warmth of the person ritually executed, now in the form of heat rays, onto the earth and thus replenish the crops and fields.

Many aspects of pre-European-contact American community life revolved around the sun's seasonal fluctuating motion across the eastern and western horizons. The sun's apparent seasonal movement, after all, signaled what time of year it was, and its location in the sky was like a timepiece regulating the segments of the day. The sun's path in the sky determined the directionality of east to west, and its zenith by default created the northern and southern directional sides. Overlapping spiral time and space for Postclassic central Mexico appears to be related to the previously mentioned spatial concept[48] as placed two-dimensionally on the earth, where center is north at high noon and south at midnight.[49] We have, then, the four directional sides and the sun's zenith point that counts as a vertical, but variable, fifth to sixth and seventh point that are basic to an indigenous Native American-wide genealogical sense of place. These world directions as based on the sun's stations are often seen as having played a major role in community planning and building for the Maya.[50] The ancient Maya conducted rituals within and outside their buildings and plazas, and their descendants have continued this practice.

The Sky, Ground, and Inner Earth as a Quatrefoil Flower

As mentioned in chapter 5, Landa described the Postclassic to the colonial Maya as conducting pilgrimage-like activities that rotated counterclockwise.[51] The Maya seem to have organized these pilgrimage ceremonies as if replicating their quadripartitioned cosmos as composed of four sides and a center. Something similar to this is illustrated in the Madrid Codex on pages 75–76, with its depiction of four-sided space and a center place as Maya directions followed during ritual processions.[52] I also mentioned in chapter 5 that the

stela-cross at Chuumuk Lu'um is where some of my j'meeno'ob consultants say the Chaako'ob rain beings converge when summoned forth from their respective four world directions. The Chaak rain patron is, of course, but a Maya analog variation on the central Mexican composite being of Tláloc. Xokén-Chuumuk Lu'um appears to have been associated during the Postclassic with the nearby Itzá Maya site of Sakí, who in turn was associated with Chichén Itzá. At Chichén Itzá's nearby cave of Balankanché are found a variety of both Tláloc and Chaak water vessels in combination with metate and mano, grinding stone, miniatures. The combination of metate and mano grinding stones, along with Tláloc and Chaak vessels, are related to earth, rain, and regeneration. Their association in this cave with joined stalactite and stalagmite columns may signify world fertility through the grinding of corn and bone into dough, in accord with my discussion on skeletal semen in chapter 6. Offerings given to Tláloc are often miniature in size and may index their association to children. In an apparent allusion to tears as raindrops, children were seemingly made to cry just before being ritually killed as an offering to this earth-and-rain–associated patron.

Tláloc vessels are often placed in strategic-landscape contexts that seem to allude to the world's horizons and the coming of the rains from the different directions.[53] Oral traditions from central Mexico relate that Tláloc kept distinct types of rain in four different jars that stand separately, with each particular jar kept on a different side of his patio, thus indexing the quartered earth.[54] Iconic elements within the Tláloc composite often allude to mountain caves as vessels from which pour out mist, clouds, springs, and streams.[55] Tláloc and Chaak are quadripartitioned composite beings that reference the regenerative powers of the earth and its nourishing waters as found within the earth's four horizontal directions that include up, middle, and down as fifth, sixth, and seventh points. Caso associated Tlálocan, the turquoise green realm of Tláloc, as being directional south within the earth. According to Sullivan, "Tláloc was the fecundator of the earth upon which all humankind depended for its sustenance, its existence: he was the moisture that made the earth fructify."[56] In addition the earth, according to Knab, was indexed as a quad-flower, and the Tláloc composite personalized this. As he says, "Tlaloc is not a rain deity. Tlaloc is the earth."[57]

Thompson, although unclear in specifics, associated the Maya crosslike k'an glyph with south, a downward direction, and the earth, and Tláloc sometimes has the k'an glyph quad-cross on his front torso.[58] Thompson associated the

k'an glyph as meaning "anew" and "completion" and further noted that for the Zapotecs, this icon signified the cyclical solar year.[59] Klein, furthermore, notes that the k'an cross in central Mexico

> signified a completed temporal cycle in some way associated with the earth, death, darkness, vegetation, and the southern world direction. . . . [and] is contained within the Aztec symbol for turquoise, the *chalchíhuitl*, which further symbolized the center of the world. Since space was organized in a sequence ending with the central world direction, the symbol implies a completed spatial cycle as well.[60]

These indexical meanings for the quad motif in central Mexico are no different from what has been noted for the Maya. The core meaning of the quad-cross cut across Mesoamerica both spatially and temporally. The quad motif references the crossing of the sky, ground, and inner earth and marks the center of the cosmos as a socially embedded place-within-space. This noted importance regarding the quad motif proves to be significant not only for Mesoamerican cosmologies but also for native North America at large.

Maize and Quads in the American Southwest and Southeast

Within Native American studies there has sometimes been a contentious territoriality that has downplayed, if not outright denied, any possibility of the diffusion of ideas from Mesoamerica to the American Southwest and Southeast. How a dynamic, indirect interaction, through non-direct, long-distance trade between these North American regions can be denied is perplexing, especially when one considers some of the cultural similarities as well as the presence of maize agriculture throughout these areas.[61] Maize requires human intervention to reproduce and could not have spread throughout these regions without humans carrying the seeds and the knowledge of how to grow and process it. As if the presence of maize in these areas were not enough to indicate some form of contact, we now have evidence of the presence of Mesoamerican-derived cacao residues in the pre-Hispanic American Southwest at Chaco Canyon.[62] The quad-cross icon is present in all three Native American regions noted above, and therefore, in order to better comprehend the full significance and importance of this motif, I will briefly step outside of Mesoamerica and into the pre-Hispanic American Southwest and Southeast.

In chapter 6 I mentioned the presence of the quad motif at the northern Mexican site of Paquimé that is part of the greater American Southwest. Southwest of Paquimé is the Río Balsas region, and this area also has pre-Columbian bowls with the quad motif (fig. 7.3), likewise to the west in Sinaloa (fig. 7.4), and to the northwest in the Hohokam area (fig. 7.5). Although there is variety in the bowls, the pattern and convention of quadripartitioning remains highly visible throughout many of these pre-Hispanic ceramics. The indigenous Americas cannot be understood in piecemeal terms but as an indivisible whole sharing similar world views at their core. These similarities emerge within their material culture as recognizable iconic patterns. Various scholars working in the American Southeast, for example, noticed that the four world directions, in association with fire, the sun, and wind, was a quite common motif in that region.[63] I previously mentioned that in Mesoamerica the quad motif and the crossed-bands icon are associated with the solstices, and Kitt Chappell mentions that at Cahokia, "a beaker fragment found in a pit near the winter solstice post bore a circle and cross symbol that for many Native American cultures symbolizes the earth and the four cardinal directions."[64]



figure 7.3: Río Balsas Quad-Cross Bowl. Museo Nacional de Antropología, México. PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR.



figure 7.4:
Sinaloa Quad-Cross Bowl.
Museo Nacional de Antropología, México.
PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR.

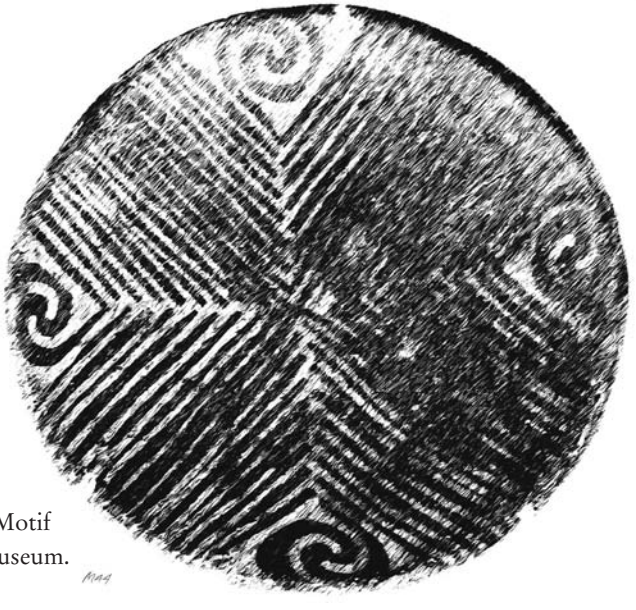


figure 7.5:
Hohokam Quad Motif
Plate. Paquimé Museum.
ART GENERATED
BY THE AUTHOR.

Power, furthermore, has noted that the Southeast cross-in-circle icon signified "the four world quadrants (comparable to north, south, east, and west) within the world circle."[65]

Significantly, considering the above, among the Cherokee the water spider was said to have brought the sun's fire down to the earth, and this reference seems to appear on Cahokian gorgets as fire carried as a cross-in-circle on a spider's back.[66] Other gorgets from Mississippian cultures demonstrate similar themes where the cross-in-circle appears related to the four winds through the image of four swirls associated with birds and the sun's fire and radiating rays (fig. 7.6). An example from the Hopewell area, furthermore, links the quad motif to serpents in a manner similar to flying serpents indexing the sky and wind, as evidenced in the American Southwest and Mesoamerica.[67] Kitt Chappell suggests that the great chiefs of Cahokia used their four-terraced mounds as greeting points for the rising sun, and this seems plausible, considering that the site of Spiro has artifacts depicting extended hands with the cross-in-circle in the middle of their palms (fig. 7.7).[68] Greeting the sun from atop their mound pyramids would proclaim to those these chiefs governed that these leaders had a special relationship as kin to the sun person, and the community was then in turn at the sun's center

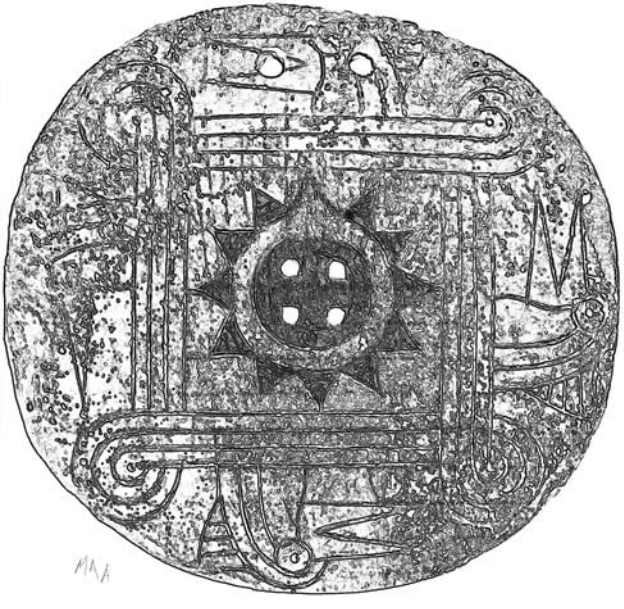


figure 7.6: Mississippian Cross-in-Circle Sun within Quad Gorget. Tennessee State Museum. ART GENERATED BY THE AUTHOR.

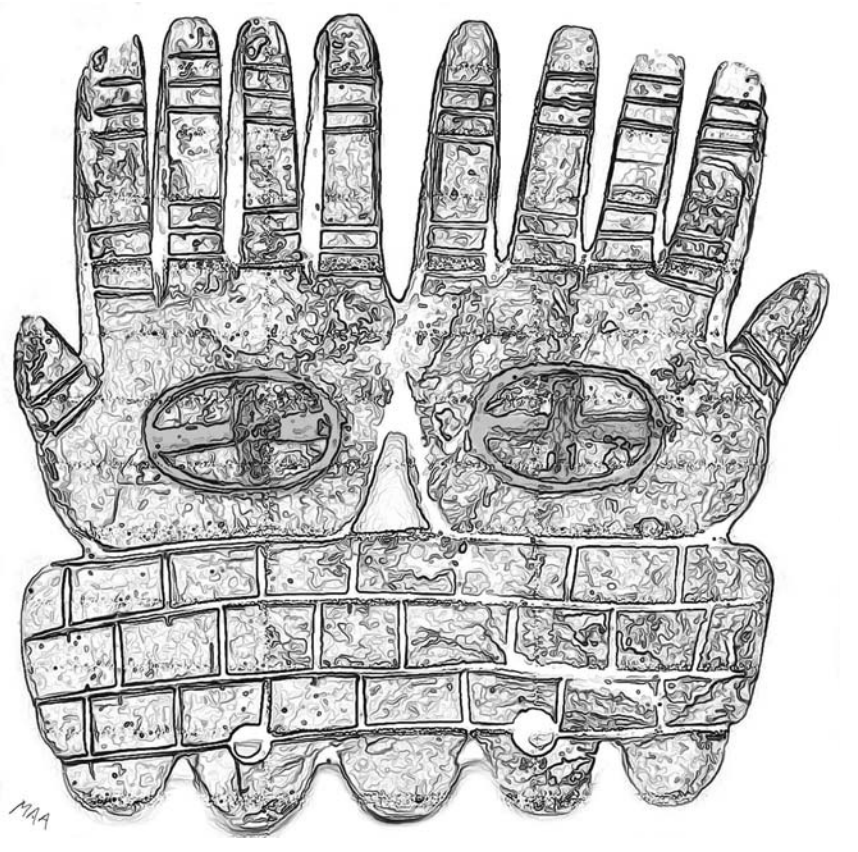


figure 7.7: Spiro Cross-in-Circle Hands Gorget. Gilcrease Museum of Tulsa. ART GENERATED BY THE AUTHOR.

of attention. This seems similar to what Mesoamerican leaders apparently did and proclaimed. According to Bullen, offered here as a plausible explanation, as the Florida peninsula and the Yucatán Peninsula extend toward each other as if bridging the Gulf of Mexico, the site of Crystal River, in northwest Florida may indicate Maya influence, as noted by the presence of stelae adjacent to burial mounds. In addition, Fort Center in central Florida had low platform mounds with associated funerary bundles.[69]

Mound pyramids in the American Southeast seem to have often been used as elites' mortuary structures.[70] The complex mortuary process and the interred paraphernalia, along with the curation of bones, seems to demonstrate a veneration of ancestors and an interest in select kin lineages just as it does for Mesoamerica.

How the above translates or evolved, however, into increasing political power can only be surmised but appears linked to ancestors, the sun person and its fire, and the winds and rains as indexed by the quad motif. Subsistence ties into these elements, for it is agricultural bounty that ties all these elements together, with maize appearing to be the prime link in most instances. As mentioned in the previous chapter, it is around maize and ancestor-associated fertility that Mesoamerican cosmologies revolve and from which many cultural continuities seem to stem starting in the Late Formative.[71] Ancestors are linked to the fertile earth as the place where the dead reside, regenerate, exhibit, and relate themselves as persons within their surrounding descendants' ancestral geographies, as composed of their built environment and surrounding ecological features such as mountains, caves, rivers, trees, and so forth.[72]

Indigenous American Concepts of Self and Person

Within pre-European-contact Native American societies, there tended to exist a focus on the ancestors and fertility that remains entrenched in some of their descendants' world views. Within these populations there appears to be a socially conditioned responsibility stressing an ongoing communication with the ancestors through material objects and or through dreamlike states. Any relationship with another being, including ancestors, requires an individual to compare oneself as to who or what he or she *is* versus other things and other persons. This comparison and evaluation brings out a psychological notion of the self. Caution admittedly needs to be exercised regarding my analysis of Native American concepts of personhood, as I do not wish to fall into a universalizing crosscultural trap. As Jones notes:

> While notions of personhood derived from the anthropological literature are useful for unsettling Western assumptions about the person, we need to be careful about figuring all non-Western persons according to a unitary anthropological model. Relationality is important, but we need to examine different ways of relating in different historical contexts . . . Nevertheless there are commonalities . . . The relationship with the past and the ancestors are critical . . . If we pay more considerable attention to personhood and social relations more generally, we need to see households and settlements as relational entities linked through complex networks of contact and exchange.[73]

Concepts of the self, then, are historically constituted within each culture as taught through social relations, as, for example, when parents guide children. Since the notion of self is passed down through the generations within an individual's cultural matrix, it is a psychological construct from which it is difficult to break away. Although there are similarities in perceptions of psychological self within societies on different continents that engage in ancestor veneration, they are not identical and should not be imposed over different peoples.[74] Individuals who engage in quotidian ancestor veneration often have a strong sense of relational lineage and communal identity that is almost as internal as the self. This notion of self is highly relational and tends to categorize the world in categories drastically different than those an individual socially conditioned in an industrial and or scientific culture focused on "me" would use. This also applies to people conditioned within historically Christian societies, as individual salvation is their end goal. Opposed to individual net worth, salvation, or both is the concept of self as based on the basic unit of ancestral lineage, family, and community.

Perrin noted that the Wixárika-Huichol have "a very Native American conception of ancestrality . . . [indicating] the power of the kin group," and my j'meeno'ob consultants' view that they live at the center of the world is formed and shaped by kinship-type social relations amongst themselves.[75] My j'meeno'ob consultants extend these kin notions to ecological elements found within the sky, ground, and inner earth that they perceive to reinvigorate and sustain them. Ritual production here emphasizes the role of earthly elements that the ancestors and other nonhumans help control and balance. The end results of my consultants' agricultural production and its associated rituals are ties to the land in terms of lineage, family, and community, and the earth, then, is emblematic and central to all that exists. Note that it is within the earth that bones and seeds regenerate in a never-ending nexus that bonds death to life and vice versa.

Nelson, Darling, and Kice have noted that at the site of La Quemada in Zacatecas, the variable burial "practices reveal the presence of a range of ongoing mortuary programs, some of which probably expressed fundamentally different relationships between the living and the dead."[76] The variability in mortuary practices occurring within the same time period at this Mesoamerican site should not surprise, as La Quemada is not exceptional in this regard. As an analogy, the Wixárika-Huichols live within the region of La Quemada, and they, like many Mesoamerican peoples, link their ancestors in varying ways to the sun



figure 7.8:
Wixárika Tepári Sun Disk.
ART GENERATED BY THE AUTHOR AFTER SCHAEFER AND FURST (1996:118, FIG. 19).

and its rays. Perrin, for example, states that the Wixárika's ancestors "travel with the rays of the rising or setting Sun and are metaphorically 'caught' by the shaman on the feathers of his *muvieri* (plumed wand) and lowered into the waiting votive gourd bowl."[77] It should not surprise the reader at this point, then, that the Wixárika associate quad-cross world directions and center with the sun and ancestors. This link is visible in Wixárika material culture from their *tepári* stone disks, with the quad and center icon (fig. 7.8), that are related to sunrise and sunset and considered the resting (tethering) place of the ancestors.[78]

Burial-Context Ceramics, Personhood, and the Relational Ancestors

Bowls, plates, and cups placed in burials, especially those with quad motifs that index the sun, appear to be vessels associated with skeletal material to which the dead are tethered by ritual intercessors. The typical assumption that bowls and other items placed in burials are for the dead to use in their otherworldly

afterlife seems to have no basis in Native American indigenous thought. Why would ancestors require plates and bowls in a supernatural world of the dead when they need humans to feed and care for them in the here and now? Of paramount importance here is what the treatment of the dead entails regarding the social practice and relations of the living with the deceased and their associated burial objects. As Jones notes, "It is obviously insufficient to simply 'read' different orders of personhood from the fragmented remains of human bodies or artifacts. Our focus must be upon social practice, the way in which persons are produced and perform. The key point is that relationally persons are created through networks of relationships and these networks include things as well as people."[79]

Within this context, it is crucial to note that lived experience, within the indigenous nature and agency of individuals and objects, is paramount when considering how social relations, and therefore personhood, is formulated and cast.[80] My discussion here is obviously seeking to problemize our past Western constructs regarding Mesoamerican world views.[81] If quad-cross icons on ancient Native American vessels have not often been reported as significant, it is because at the moment of their excavation or analysis such imagery is not recognized as important, seen as anecdotal, or simply categorized as geometric. As noted, however, in chapter 5, quad motifs in ceramics are sometimes simply burnished and polished (fig. 5.18) and therefore easy to dismiss if detected at all.[82] Similar to the placement of ceramics within burials are the openmouthed masks sometimes accompanying them that signify a sentient and communicating ancestor (fig. 6.9). As used within indigenous Native American world views, masks, impersonations, or both do not as such seem to transform people into gods, contrary to the claims of Fogelson and Walker.[83] Within this context we need to analyze the native set of relations between these peoples and the composition of nonhuman sentient persons.

The Native American use of masks and impersonations seems to signify and evoke a particular personal being's skills, knowledge, ritual potency, and power.[84] Native American personhood concepts should not simply be an aside to our studies. At this point in time they need to take central importance. There is no direct concrete evidence that Native American nonhumans are deified; rather there seem to be extensive associations of these composite personalized beings with various earthly phenomena.[85] Furthermore, these are then associated with and contain many of what, to us, are confusing, ambiguous, conflating, and often contradictory values, attributes, and identities. What is morally good and

bad in Native American relational world views seems relatively dependent and contextual to specific situations. The outcome sought within Native American world views is not the triumph of good over evil but the maintenance of social balance between and amongst what is seen and unseen. An individual's moral standing by our Western binary categories of right and wrong and religious and secular does not matter to the multiple nonhuman persons with which Native Americans tend to share their world. Concepts such as the sanctity of the numinous, divine, and holy, based on the evolutionary Lutheran Christian scheme of Otto, are not applicable here.[86]

The Native American relational world, in which interrelations and ritual production are based on social reciprocal debt and merit, reigns supreme even if this production and its desired goal are violent, abhorrent, and ethically questionable by our Western morals.[87] That said, however, even within the Judeo-Christian-Muslim world views, as sister religions tracing themselves to Abraham the prophet, the end outcome often justifies the means to attain it.[88] Still, the means to achieve many goals within Native American world views appears to revolve around the venerating, through reciprocal obligations, of a variety of unseen ancestors and other nonhuman persons that make themselves known to human senses in various ways. This is amply evident within codependent relationships established with nonvisible named and unnamed personal beings associated with particular ecological forces.

The personalization of the earth as Tláloc, as I explained previously, is a prime example of these complicated codependent relations noted above. Sahagún, for example, regarded as the father of Mesoamerican ethnography, acknowledged how difficult it was to understand the complex nature and peg the identities of assumed deities such as Tláloc into discrete gods.[89] Within Native American world views, there tends to be a central cultural logic that nonhuman beings are immanent entities driven by personal needs and wants. All human and nonhuman beings as persons, including the sun, moon, lightning, and so forth, need each other and humans in order to be fed and continue to exist. Within Mesoamerican cosmologies the sun person needs to eat, and it, just like meteorites and stars, therefore also needs to defecate.[90] Berdan and Anawalt note that the Codex Mendoza in depicting a quad-cross motif, just like the one on the Mexican funerary urn in figure 6.2, refers to excrement from the sun.[91] Mesoamerican nonhuman persons require sustenance in a variety of forms, just like humans, in order to continue existing and functioning. Some of my Maya consultants say that some of their forest beings, such as the *aluxo'ob*

tricksters, are ceasing to exist because people in the villages are giving them less regular offerings than in the past.

Embodying the Maya Self: The Tethering of Personhood

According to some of my j'meeno'ob consultants, all ecological phenomena are somehow linked to humans and nonhuman beings. All personal beings live side-by-side in seen and unseen states, and j'meeno'ob ritual activities, when making offerings, are aimed at patron beings who contextually support, and give material structure to, what they aim to influence or control. Chaak is a rain patron, a nonhuman entity that is a composite of other similar earthly persons, that supports and supervises water structure and the weather phenomenon associated with its home the earth. In return for their favors, the patrons of sunlight, moonlight, rain, and so forth receive offerings from humans in the form of incense, burned wax, food, drink, and flowers, whose nourishing essence fortifies them. The giving of offerings does not mean that ancestors or other nonhuman persons do whatever the ritual production intended as its goal. These beings are often actually fickle and unresponsive to the point of annoyance for some of my Maya consultants.

Within the ritual practice of my j'meeno'ob consultants, it becomes evident that some nonhumans have stronger and greater skills than others. For this reason, there is nothing wrong with discarding or breaking communicating objects associated with nonhuman persons one seeks to disassociate oneself from. Communicating objects are but the material foci of the j'meeno'ob as they communicate, relate, and interact with invisible noncorporeal persons. Noncorporeal persons are caught and tethered to these objects through the j'meen's ritual production. The reversal of catching and tethering is often done by breaking the object unless the noncorporeal being has already strayed and permanently decided not to return. Vogt refers to a ritual process similar to this as fixing and unfixing, and this appears to have an analog in what the ancient Maya were doing with what are often labeled ensoulment, activating, and terminating of vessels and structures.[92] The ancient Maya, by analogy then, might have perceived their homes, monumental structures, towns, and cities as having tethered nonhuman beings. These powerful, yet ritually tethered, invisible nonhuman persons probably varied in terms of their skills and the weaknesses that made them vulnerable. Some of my j'meen consultants, as mentioned previously in chapter 4, have these notions concerning not only their communicating

objects but also the structures that house them. Communicating objects and structures are seen within some of my j'meen consultants' views as if having humanlike sentience and volition.[93] For this reason my j'meen consultants tether, as they would to an object, what we consider in Judeo-Christian terms a soul to a flesh-and-blood vessel we call a human body.

This concept of the tethering of persons is somewhat difficult to understand in the abstract. It took me practically a decade of living off and on with the Maya to not only recognize this but also somewhat grasp its implications. The first requirement is to get out of our trying to equate our human-soul notions in our studies within other people's beliefs.[94] Peoples not from a Western, Judeo-Christian-Muslim background tend not to have our specific concept of soul. Evans-Pritchard, for example, says as much for the Azande. Vogt, more pertinent to this work, says for the Zinacantan Maya, "I use the term 'soul' advisedly to indicate that the familiar European concepts of 'souls' and 'spirits' are inadequate for precise ethnographical description." Having explained this crucial point, let me then use *myself* here as an example of the manner in which some of my j'meen consultants perceive what constitutes *my person*. The Miguel person is not given birth along with the flesh-and-blood object recognized as the thing that at some point in time began to be called Miguel. The Miguel person is in actuality a nonhuman, noncorporeal, invisible being that gets tethered to and hovers in and around, and can sometimes stray from, the communicating flesh-and-blood object materially focused on as this particular Miguel. The tethering of the Miguel person to an object, in this case, a flesh-and-blood child's body, takes place not at birth but when this Miguel so-and-so is recognized as beginning to show personality traits, that is, when it starts to demonstrate itself as a full-fledged relational and volitional being.

Being alive, then, or being human, for that matter, is not enough to be considered a person. Personhood is acquired and maintained through willful relational experience; for this reason, an extremely meek individual within the Maya villages where I work may be seen as not really *wiinik*, that is, a person. A well-centered heat of personality, as demonstrated through the previously explained ritual potency of k'uh, is evidenced in degrees by a vessel, here a flesh-and-blood object, exhibiting well-calculated agency. At the point when an object consistently begins to demonstrate the agency to willfully interact, the j'meen can then tether this developing personality to that flesh-and-blood object that is now being considered a person. The tethering of personhood onto human bodies, for many of my consultants, is done at approximately three to four months old.

My j'meen friends link this tethering process to the ritual production they call *jeets meek* or *jek' iit*, which refers to the straddling of the child on one's hips. The modern adaptation of the jeets meek ritual is symbolically linked to the Roman Catholic baptismal rite, which is why many outsiders apparently all too easily associate it with the Christian soul. The jeets meek in actuality concerns seating, that is, tethering, the child's personality by having this person being ritually recognized as a future volitional man or woman within their community. Person here, then, refers to a being, material or nonmaterial, that has personal character traits as demonstrated through its communication, behavior, and willingness to interact.

Vogt documented the similar tethering, what he labeled "fixing," of personhood to human bodies in Zinacantán, Chiapas. Roman Catholic baptism also seems to have at some point influenced the establishment of person in Zinacantán, in this case, by its having to be urgently done while the child is still a baby. The end outcome of tethering personhood to bodies, however, seems similar to what is done in the Yucatán. Vogt says this ritual establishes the identity of the child, by "initiating the socialization process, and helps fix the innate soul into the new body."[95] Redfield and Villa Rojas believed, as I do, that the jeets meek was not adapted from Roman Catholicism but stemmed from an ancient rite, in accord with Landa's observations.[96] As a child can be abandoned and left to its own devices, now being a person, so can an unresponsive nonhuman be threatened or no longer cared for. The relationship can be severed and therefore terminated. Attention can be switched to another, more reciprocally minded or more skilled nonhuman person. Nonhuman persons share composite attributes of one another in their relation to what Maya ritualists seek to accomplish within their interactive relationship. Maya nonhumans, including the ancestors and Chaak, coexist amongst themselves and humans on an almost equal, but rather complex, balanced footing that is based on willing or forced social reciprocity. Chaak, for example, can be willing and or petty with his rain, and this, depending on his mood, may or may not have anything to do with the actions of those he is overindulging or unforgiving with. The Chaako'ob, in other words, are demonstrably fickle.

Because noncorporeal persons are fickle they can leave objects they are tethered to and tether themselves to other objects of their own accord. Just like Chaak is a composite of multiple beings, so are some humans, according to some of my j'meeno'ob consultants. Because Mesoamerican humans can have more than one being tethered to their bodies, some individuals are sometimes perceived as

having multiple "souls," that is, multiple persons. For the this reason, I believe, every single being called a god within the assumed Mesoamerican pantheon has multiple and variable attributes, which confounds and defies it being pegged. What can be traced within the attributes of these named beings are iconically visible patterns and conventions, but this does not make them discrete gods. The entity we know as K'awiil for the ancient Maya, for example, would be without peer in this regard. As often as this multifaceted being is represented in ancient Maya imagery we still do not have a good grasp of this entity.[97] As a side interest here, some of my Maya friends have K'auil as a surname, and this includes one of my j'meen consultants. This Maya seemed more than a bit uneasy when I asked what his last name meant. He said that k'auil means the very ritually potent but often ugly and explosive side of Chaak.

As explained in chapter 4, the various facets of Chaak, as its multiple components of the Chaako'ob, are related by some of my j'meen consultants to the four directions and as if meeting at the center of Chuumuk Lu'um, where the stone-cross sits. Other ancestral beings are also likened as if moving through the quad-directions in counterclockwise fashion. This is what, according to one of my j'meen consultants, the deceased are doing before being exhumed during their three- to five-year interment. During their counterclockwise travels, the deceased visit places already seen and beings already interacted with in dreams when these people were in a physical body.[98] The four quarters and center relate, as previously mentioned in chapter 5, to the solstices and equinoxes according to the moving stations of the sun. When my j'meen consultants speak of their ancestors moving about counterclockwise, they refer to this action as being prone as well as vertical so that it three-dimensionally includes the sky, ground, and inner earth. Perhaps this explains why some ancient funeral pyramids have quadrilateral sides.

World directions for Native Americans are likened as if in a cross shape having from four to seven sides with its fifth being a "navel" as its center.[99] Pfeiffer wrote for Cahokia a fanciful yet appropriate passage that brings to bear how Native Americans might have conceived the significance of the quad-cross motif. As the sun's burning fire radiates and passes across the world's directions, thus regenerating the earth,

> the warrior, among the people now, comes to the center of the plaza, where a great cross of four logs points in the cardinal directions. Bending down, he empties the contents of the bowl onto a pile of leaves and

> branches, and blows on the embers. A shout comes from the surrounding crowd as the rising flames leap from the cross. A miracle has occurred, a renewal, fresh fire from the heavens, captured and brought down to earth through the auspices of the Great Sun . . . [I]t is the beginning of the harvest festival . . . The corn is green.[100]

For many Native Americans today, crosses index the ritually potent numerical four as signified by their directional arms. Since the four directional winds carry pollen, and thus life as well as medicine, some crosses in the Southwest are sometimes painted a bright yellow that associates them with the sun. Southwest Pueblo communities, then, as center are often thought of as being in the middle of the quadrilateral earth.

The Méxica of central Mexico considered their *tlaxico*, navel of the earth, as connected to Mictlán, the land of the dead.[101] Core indexing regarding the quad-cross, the sun, and the dead extends deep in terms of Native American temporal and spatial cultural similarities. These indexes might have had their inception within the equatorial area in the Americas as created by the Tropic of Capricorn at latitude 23.5° south and by the Tropic of Cancer at latitude 23.5° north. At these latitudes the sun casts no shadows at its midday zenith from the point of view of the earthbound observer. This phenomena, coupled with the fact that, as Milbrath noted, the sun seems as if it is coming closer to the observer during zenith passage, may explain why my j'meen consultants think the ritual day begins at chuumuk k'in (midday).[102]

How the sun moves as it gives off its warming and nourishing rays of light has important ramifications for understanding indigenous American concepts as related to directions in relation to where one's community is situated. Understanding the self in relation to the sun and its movements and how life regenerates from its giving or withholding of sunlight further gives insight into how Native Americans relate to death and other living persons, both human and nonhuman. Within this logic it follows that if all persons must pass through a regenerative cycle, then, too, so must the sun. We know that keeping the sun from going into this transformative cycle, which begins with death and therefore its extinguishing, was a fixation for the Méxica, who thought that the sun person, *Tonatiuh*, was in its fifth regenerative cycle. This idea is explicit within their associated quad imagery expressing the sun person's central presence.[103] The Méxica, as Klein noted, "conceived of space as it would appear on a horizontal plane. This horizontal concept frequently took a form resembling a

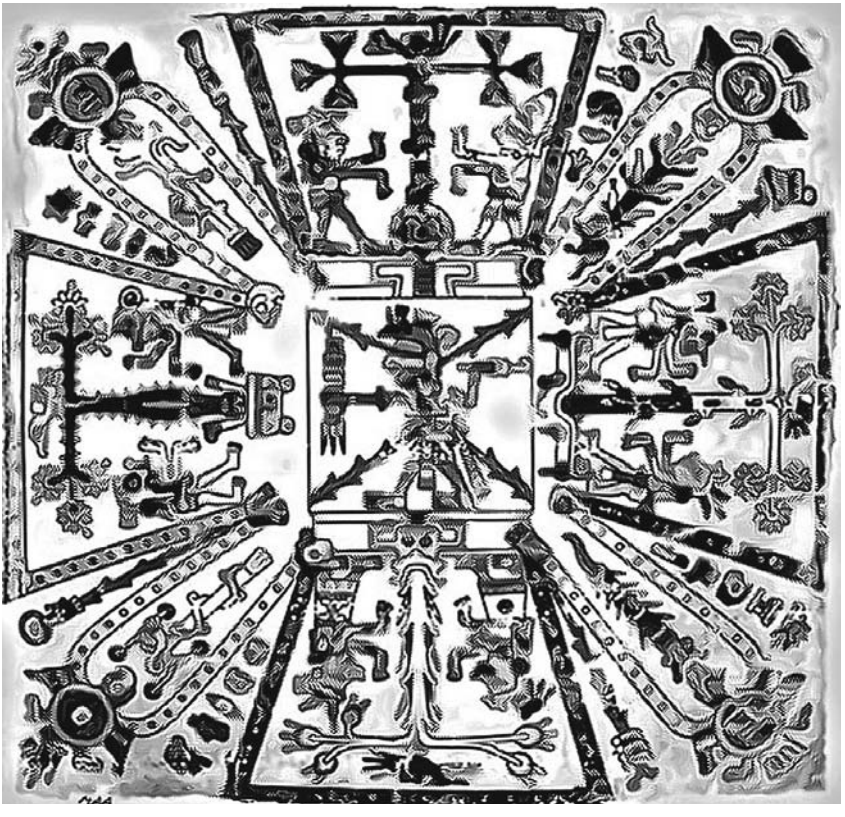


figure 7.9: Codex Fejérvary-Mayer World Trees.
ART GENERATED BY THE AUTHOR.

Maltese cross, as seen in the famous so-called 'world-direction chart' of Codex Fejérvary-Mayer's page 1. Each arm of the cross corresponded to one of the four world directions."[104] The Codex Fejérvary-Mayer does in fact show the earth's center and world directions as supported by different species of trees and birds (fig. 7.9).[105]

South American Cousins and the Quad-Relational World

Although I have numerous times used the term Native American in referring to the indigenes of the Americas as a whole, I have so far avoided referring to indigenous South American quad motifs. South American sources, ancient

to contemporary, also provide many references to the quad-cross as related to directions, the sun, trees, and ancestors. The Lanzón monolith at Chavín de Huántar, for example, was placed within a cruciform gallery and is thought to have been a communicating object that was given voice by a medium ritual intercessor.[106] Another one of these objects at Chavín was the Tello Obelisk that, according to Quilter, "at the notch near its top is a stepped cross with a circle in it center, a motif symbolizing the unity of the cosmos. Widespread in the Pre-Columbian Andes, the motif is found in Andean art to this day."[107] Tiwanaku's Akapana structure shares a commonality with those mentioned above in that it was laid out in the ubiquitous Andean-highlands cruciform shape that, as in North America, is also thought to represent the four world quarters.[108] Similar to the world trees, intercardinal directions, and the cross as explained throughout this work, Wilbert has found that for the Warao of Venezuela, "at the cardinal and intercardinal points of the universe, there are world mountains that are believed to be gigantic petrified trees. These mountains are the abodes of certain deities whom the *Warao* refer to collectively as *Kanobotuma* = 'Our Grandfathers.' Included also are the gods of the zenith and nadir."[109]

A parallel, then, exists between pre-European-contact indigenous North American and South American quad-cross motifs in that in both connected continents, the icon was associated with the weather. Native Americans in both continents, furthermore, seemed to have just as readily adapted and subtly integrated this icon to varying degrees within the context of colonial Roman Catholic religious expression.[110] The reason for the integration of the Roman Catholic and indigenous American crosses seems linked to life renewal and fertility. Agricultural rites and their associated icons, according to Wallace, are often technological in nature, and their function is to influence rain patterns linked to planting and harvesting in order to produce agricultural bounty.[111] The livelihood of agricultural-ritual participants depends on a successful crop, with daily work built around the tasks of planting, tending, and harvesting as related to the maturation cycles of plants.[112] According to Urton, for example, social cooperation is required in Andean communities because of cooperative water-management procedures and the ritual movement of agriculture-linked crosses that represent rain and hail through a linking of the cruciform icon with intersecting axes in the heavens.[113] Andean crosses, then, are strikingly similar in function to Mesoamerican crosses in their use during rain-associated rituals.

Native American Relational World Views as a New World Cosmology

Much archaeological, ethnohistorical, and ethnographic evidence throughout the indigenous Americas suggests the presence of enough core similarities throughout both continents to comprise what can be called a New World Cosmology. As Christianities are studied within their millennia-long evolution and differing historical trajectories, while keeping in mind their similarities, so should indigenous American traditions. Native Americans have established, over the millennia, just as complex world views that establish their sense of place-within-space and being in this world. Many contemporary Maya live within cosmologies much different from ours. These concepts descend from their ancestors and remain alive, meaningful, and powerful. This does not mean that the contemporary Maya live in another world than we do or that their ancestors did. The Maya world is the same physical world we live in but seen through a different culturally composed lens. Differing world views are not genetically bound but socially conditioned from birth. The Maya peoples have actively adapted and synthesized new ideas, as they have consciously seen to fit their view of the cosmos.

The Mayas, through their individual agency, have transformed their ancestors' cosmological model by applying the basic template, or structure, of that model to Iberian Roman Catholicism.[114] Maya cosmological views, being phenomenalistic in that their main concern is founded on sensory realities, have proven resilient for more than five hundred years of Roman Catholic indoctrination. As explained in chapters 4 through 6, many of my Maya consultants who keep crosses color them green, wrap them, and link these and other communicating objects to ancestral Maya invisible nonhuman persons. The invisible beings associated with crosses help assist the Maya with their cornfields by summoning the Chaako'ob as well as by serving to protect them from illness causing iik'o'ob (wind entities). The function of Maya crosses is in most cases similar to the Native America-wide bundling custom associated with windlike persons that influence weather.[115] Kearney, for example, has also documented similar illness-causing wind persons for the Zapotec.[116] I reiterate that to my Maya consultants their crosses do not typically represent the suffering Christ, nor are cruciform objects customarily kept and petitioned to access the Son of God as their savior. As I have been told in various ways, "*krus u tial e lelo kuxtun e crucifijo utial e iglesia waa baaloo yaantaki*," "The cross is for this (the cornfield and home), and the crucifix is for that in the church. They are different." The differential crux in

the Maya cross and the Roman Catholic crucifix lies in the disparity within their iconic significance. In the following, I come full circle as I suggest a preliminary paradigm shift for the interpreting of Native American world views.

Despite our great knowledge concerning indigenous America, we still lack a cohesive, realistic interpretation of Maya cosmologies. McAnany has stated persuasively that the ancient Maya did not practice "ancestor worship" but maintained active communication with their "living ancestors."[117] The full implication of McAnany's bold hypothesis, which many researchers have yet to fully investigate, is that pre-Columbian Mesoamericans maintained dynamic social relations with their dead. I explored in this work the all too often applied assumption that ancient Mesoamericans held theological beliefs concerning binary, supernaturalistic sacredness. Durkheim's view of the sacred was far from synonymous with the divine. What he constituted as sacred was not its being divinely manifest; instead, sacrality was the subject of prohibitions that set something held in awe as radically apart from that considered secular.[118] Inherent in this notion of sacredness, however, is a binary consisting of "a quality of mysterious and awesome power."[119]

Elaborating here from McGee, while the practices and social concerns of a people, including politics, games, names, titles, and so on, "may reflect the worldview of a people [it] should not be interpreted to mean that the worldview is inherent" within every activity.[120] Our interpretations of ancient religions may come superficially close to what is depicted within their material culture, therefore satisfying those seeking transcultural universals. They still, however, lack the thick, indigenous contextual meaning required to better grasp particular cosmological subjectivities.[121] Houston and Stuart, in qualifying the term "god," as applied to Maya rulers, state that ancient kings' names provide little data on how, why, and what was actually meant by their particular associations with "deities."[122] Despite their variability, Mesoamerican world views are founded upon relations with ancestral entities usually addressed in terms of kinship metaphor. Noncorporeal kin beings need to interrelate with humans and are therefore dependent on reciprocities.[123]

Multidirectional Causality, Ecological Beings, and Native American Experientiality

Spanish colonial priests, as mentioned in chapter 3, saw indigenous Americans as involved in satanic worship, hence their severe actions against their cultural

practices.[124] The friars apparently failed or chose not to see that Mesoamericans aimed their ritual activity at composite ancestral lineage figures. Could it simply be, though, that the Spaniards understood this all too well and knew how great an ideological threat such a continuation of these practices would pose to their colonial endeavor? That Native Americans continued native practices despite harsh treatment at the hands of their colonizers speaks to great degree as to how important they deemed their customs and way of life. Scholes and Roys were of the opinion that the danger the Spaniards posed to the Maya was so great that for this reason only, Postclassic beings such as "the rain and wind gods and the tutelary divinities of the lineages" continued to receive offerings.[125] Perhaps, however, their suggestion makes little sense. How would their suggestion play out in practice considering the harsh Spanish oppressive tactics? Roman Catholic friars certainly did not look the other way regarding the Maya's communicating, ancestral-lineage bundles, as they considered these to be demonic oracles. As mentioned previously, communication through chants, dance, dreams, and offerings is a Native American-wide practice seeking kinship solidarity with other humans and personalized nonhumans.[126]

Native American ritual production emphasizes transformative and generative performance, stressing the actions of a motivated sponsor or sponsors, for and with nonhumans, evoked in order to create meaning-making activities that build and strengthen bonds.[127] Schaefer and Furst, for example, mention that for the Wixárika-Huichols, all beings are called forth "by kinship terms . . . [as] religion permeates all aspects of [their] life. Most Huichols do not distinguish between the sacred and what we would regard as 'secular.' In truth nothing is really 'profane.'"[128] As mentioned in chapter 1, the makeup of Mesoamerican nonhumans does not fit our Western concepts of gods, deities, demons, and ghosts existing in other worlds or dimensions that pass through supernatural portals into the natural world. Furthermore, while the act of worshipping requires respect, the reverse is not true, that is, respectful veneration of some person or thing does *not* in of itself equal worship. While elder ancestors gain more respect generation after generation, and likewise, certain other personalized and powerful nonhumans, this does not mean that in indigenous terms these beings are worshipped as *supernatural gods*.[129]

I stress elsewhere that according to Schaefer and Furst, "we call these powers 'supernatural,' literally, something outside of, above, and greater than, nature. But for the Huichols, as for other native peoples, they are *in* nature. Indeed, they *are* nature."[130] Knab, in addition, states that Mesoamerican

cosmologies are "based on a natural philosophy integrating the natural world with the supernatural."[131] For many indigenous Mesoamericans, then, their interactive cosmos is replete with nonhuman persons, and like human beings, these entities are sentient and have volition. Active objects, however, are *not* literally considered animate, for it is the invisible nonhuman persons tethered to the material vessel that are sentient.[132] As Schaefer and Furst put it, non-Western, indigenous cosmologies "are often called 'animistic,' if not 'nature worship.' It would be more accurate to call them 'ecological,'" that is, not supernatural.[133]

Similar to the treelike-cross communicating objects I mentioned for the Maya, the Mayo and Yaqui Indians in northwestern Mexico venerate botanical-like crosses that they also differentiate from Roman Catholic crucifixes.[134] As noted in chapter 4, my Maya consultants do not tend to associate their crosses with the suffering Christ and often address them as if they were trees.[135] In correlation to this, during 1867 in the Chamula Maya highlands in Chiapas, one Pedro Díaz Cuscat created a shrine for three green communicating stones that supposedly fell from the sky.[136] The three green stones appear related to the three-stone hearth that indexes the upper world as found in many traditional Maya homes.[137] As mentioned in chapter 6, the Maya are known to house other types of communicating stones, as well as communicating speleothems taken from caves.[138] Mesoamericans also use various other materials for their communicating with nonhuman persons, for example, the Wixárika-Huichols use feathers,[139] the Yucatek Maya ceramic bowls, and the Momostenango Maya blood.[140] The Zinacanteco Maya are known to communicate with blood through the *ch'ulel*, soul-like being, inside people.[141] It is this blood person that speaks and not the blood itself. As Vogt notes, to the Maya "the most important interaction going on in the universe is not between persons and material objects, but rather between souls inside these persons and material objects."[142] The concept of ch'ulel beings within blood, as unseen but felt, soul-like persons, for the contemporary Maya appears similar to their ancient ancestors' world views and is apparently depicted in bloodletting and blood burned as incense imagery.[143] Furthermore, Freidel, Schele, and Parker state that the ancient Maya daubed blood on objects in order to *p'a chi'*, that is, offer and open the mouth.[144] As mentioned in chapter 5, the modern Maya practice of making live blood offerings, such as throwing pigs onto their backs and ritually killing them, although now rare, is sometimes done in honor of communicating objects.[145]

A recurring theme I have brought up throughout this work is that Meso-

american ancestors are thought of as living, relational, and associated with the sun and its quadripartitioning rays of light. McAnany's insight that Preclassic Maya ancestors remained on earth, as live kin still useful to the living, is applicable to much of Mesoamerica and most, if not all, of the Native American way of life.[146] Highly reminiscent of the K'axob burials containing vessels with quad-cross icons adjacent to the skull, although here in a quad-flower form, are examples from Tula, Hidalgo (fig. 7.10). Similarly, Suárez Cruz documented a Classic Cholula, Puebla, burial, where he found a quad-flower-shaped stone inside a bowl placed under the buried person's skull.[147] Suárez Cruz says that although he found the location of the quad-cross interesting, taking the time to diligently document how he found it, he simply took it as an offering at the



figure 7.10: Tula Human Skeleton and Quad-Flower Vessel. Tula Museum. PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR.



figure 7.11:
Cholula Cross Vessel.
PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR.
COURTESY OF SERGIO SUÁREZ CRUZ.

time. He adds that finding the quad motif or the crossed-bands in Puebla burial context is not that odd (fig. 7.11).[148]

So why, then, do not all archaeologically known burials have vessels with this highly recognizable quad motif? Four reasons come immediately to mind. One, many burials have been disturbed or looted from ancient to modern times. Two, the quad motif can be on other interred objects and not just on vessels. Three, the icon does not have to be conspicuous and can simply be included in burnished, polished, or graffiti form. Four, if noted at all, the motif has often been simply categorized as a geometric figure. What is of prime importance here are not so much the vessels themselves but that the quad-cross icon is associated with ancestors and signifies them as tethered to a place as if resting or sleeping. Throughout the Maya area, there are in fact ministructures that we understand to be lineage-related ancestor sleeping houses.[149] Furthermore, there are also large shrinelike structures, such as the cross group at Palenque, that are known to be ancestor related and as indexical, nonfunctional sweat baths, they signify the birthplace of specific lineage- and polity-related nonhumans.[150]

Palenque, interestingly, has particular walls within its palace that have windowlike apertures in the form of the quad-cross motif (fig. 7.12) that are very similar to those found at the palace of Tonina, Chiapas. Why these window apertures are in the form of quad-cross motifs can only be conjectured, as I am

unaware of any direct study of their purpose. I assume that some of the Tonina examples are related to solstice or equinox phenomena, as they have a very limited, narrow scope and do not function very well as windows (fig. 7.13). In similar fashion, although not in aperture form, other sites, such as Yagul, Oaxaca, have quad-cross motifs on walls and niches similar to those at Mitla, Oaxaca. Mitla, in addition, has cruciform-shaped burials. Mesoamerican structures that had quad-shaped apertures or quad-shaped niches could have served as charnels for bundles. For example, the ones depicted on page 19 in the Mixtec Nuttall Codex have quads on the structure as well as on its banner (fig. 7.14).



figure 7.12: Palenque Quad-Niche Aperture. PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR.



figure 7.13: Tonina Quad-Window. PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR.

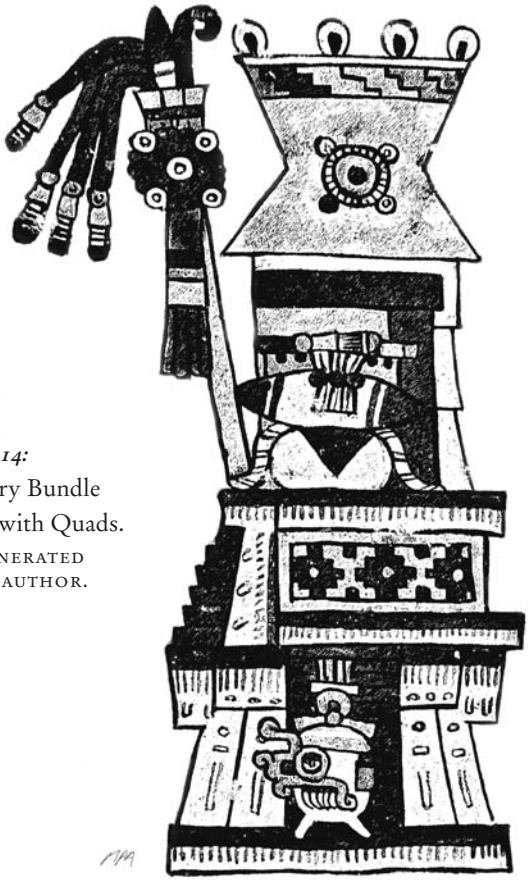


figure 7.14:
Funerary Bundle Shrine with Quads.
ART GENERATED BY THE AUTHOR.

Human Senses and Mesoamerican Composite Ancestors

Ancient Mesoamericans considered their ancestors as extensions of themselves, their community, their ecology, and the social order they were born into. Much remains the same in some of the villages I work in and likewise has been documented in other Maya areas where the ancestors still maintain a hold on the order of social life within their communities.[151] Ancestors within these world views are generative and related to production and reproduction. Ancestors and lineage composite beings are a mere form of self-reflection in terms of community and social order. Some of these lineage composites sometimes manifest themselves in the form of the earth-linked Chaak. As mentioned previously, this Maya rain patron is but a composite analog to the central Mexican Tláloc.

Composite beings such as Tláloc can be associated with community- or polity-specific ideologies as linked to the surrounding landscape.

Prime landscape markers are mountains and caves from where moistness, mist, vapor, and clouds seem to emanate from their holdings of water such as those found in associated springs, streams, and lakes. As Klein noted,

> the similarity and overlapping of the associations of the various earth goddesses surely accounts for the similarity and interchangeability of their forms and attributes in Post-Classic visual imagery . . . It is an understanding of the nature of this relationship which makes possible the simplification and ordering of Post-Classic cosmology.[152]

I agree, but not completely. Townsend has also proposed what I previously also attributed to other scholars: that the very name of Tláloc does not mean rain god but the vaguer composite of "from the earth."[153] My prime example of Tláloc being one of the most widely recognized and referenced central Mexican nonhuman persons gives evidence that Mesoamerican cosmologies are founded upon coherent world views centered on the earth.[154] Landscape forces that become personalized, typically classified as personified in many Native American studies, are related to as kinship beings that are patrons of variable ecological elements.[155] Native Americans often refer to the sun, mountains, clouds, rain, and so forth in kin terms.[156]

A practical way to focus the human senses and ritual production aimed at nonhuman kinfolk is facilitated by the material creation of bundles and effigies to which ritual intercessors then tether these beings. In the greater Southwest, bundles created by the wrapping of white cloth are related to as if they were puffy clouds in the sky and vice versa, thereby signifying some of the ancestors as rain patrons.[157] While bundles seem to be initially linked to specific ancestors, these objects tend to become general lineage icons during the passage of time. Over the generations a lineage icon's identity seems to become blurred, while a composite-type image emerges. As a composite this icon can now represent various lineages as well as take on various landscape forms and earthly elements. The various attributes can make the fluid composite at once easily recognizable while variably useful to the populace at large. The lineage composite, in effect, helps create similar patterns in cosmological identity and the maintaining of a balanced social order with like aims and values. By a lineage composite becoming more widely dispersed,

its accompanying cosmological world-view structure could be more widely related to and understood.

Both Andean and Maya crosses tend to be wrapped as if bundled, and to some extent this tradition seems to have been adopted from the Iberian Roman Catholic custom of shrouding the dead with a sheet. The historical evolution of the indigenous shroud, although somewhat ambiguous, still points to the earth, the ancestors, fertility, and rain. Indigenous bundles in North America are often linked to large cottonwood trees and the Wixárika-Huichol are known, for example, to wrap stones into bundles with this type of cotton.[158] The significance of the wrapped stones is that they have an ancestor attached, that is, what I call tethered, to them.[159] Schaefer says that these stones, in similar fashion to Maya crystals, are in some sense the physical manifestations of ancestors, but she assumes that these bundled stones are somehow sacred.[160] The Maya are known to sell their seemingly sacred green crosses to tourists. Likewise, according to Perrin, "Much to the astonishment of outsiders, Huichols will sometimes readily part with such a potent relic [the ancestor stone bundle] after several years of use."[161] Southwestern Pueblo peoples are also known to sell *katsinas* as indigenous crafts in tourist shops. How can this be? How can seemingly sacred indigenous American objects be sold off for monetary gain to tourists?

Ritual objects, as Perrin explains for the Wixárika, can be done away with or sold off because it is not the container that is important. What is important is the associated nonhuman person, and these beings can leave their containers of their own accord or simply be transferred and tethered to another object by a ritual intercessor.[162] Gell notes the same for Polynesia, and, more important to this work, it is the same with my Maya consultants, and hence my preface and the socioreligious theory found throughout this work.[163] The skin or material container is *not* sacred and it is not what is important per se. What is important are the on-going relationships with the noncorporeal person or persons that can be tethered to these objects. McGee has recorded something similar for the Lacandon Maya, even though he categorizes their *lak-il k'uh* censer ceramics as "god pots." He admits, for example, that the Lacandon do not in actuality think of their censer ceramics as gods or depictions of such; rather these objects are taken to be humanlike and serve as a medium to make offerings to and communicate with ancestral beings. The Lacandon, for this reason, keep their communicating effigy censers sheltered in shrines and later discard them as if they were ancestral bones.[164] Like the Maya, the Wixárika need to terminate, that is, dispose of, communicating objects from time to time because of their tethered

being(s) getting overfed through ritual production and therefore gaining more ritual potency than its caretakers want. Similar to my Maya consultants' views, these overfed, noncorporeal persons are a danger to humans and can cause illness and death.[165] As I mentioned in chapter 5, some of the ritual production in honor of the stela-cross must be immediately unwound to unfeed what has been given this object, lest it becomes too ritually potent, too powerful to handle, and therefore pathogenic. Perrin notes that for the Wixárika, this in part explains why "the soul of a dead person that still wanders close to the living, has to be restrained periodically, and temporarily 'frozen' in the form of an urukáme. Thus, its pathogenic mobility is checked."[166]

The Volitional and Relational Invisible World

Because noncorporeal persons roam freely throughout the sky, ground, and inner earth, indigenous Mesoamericans tend to focus their attention on their ancestral landscape in terms of important resources such as animals, plants, springs, trees, and so forth. Within each landscape feature, such as hills, caves, sinkholes, lakes, and rivers, are found the unbounded abodes of variable ancestral patron beings. My j'meen consultants relate to these ecological patron beings as persons ontologically similar to them and speak to certain plants, animals, and other nonhuman persons within their surrounding landscape. My j'meen consultants perceive animals, plants, rocks, and a variety of organic and inorganic objects to have the capability to harbor power, knowledge, skills, and emotions in relation to invisible beings that may be associated with them. Not all living things, however, are considered to be persons, nor are all inorganic objects or places, such as hills or caves, considered as being alive. Physical morphology does not indicate what is alive. What is k'uxan (imbued with life) is indicated by a noncorporeal person or persons being associated with a particular thing or place. Quadripartitioning is related to things or places considered interactive sources of sustenance and knowledge. This indicates why many a Maya and Native American ritual begins and ends with addressing the world's horizons and center.

When a Maya ritual intercessor mentions the world directions and the multidimensional entities that he knows personally and relates to within those directions, he in effect is centering himself and those ritually present within a genealogical and ecological place-within-space. Ritual place, in effect, is established through the j'meen's experiential skills at inviting, evoking, visiting,

sharing food, and sometimes participating in music and dance with humans and nonhumans who mingle at once. Examples of this are the busy pilgrimage rituals I discussed in chapter 5. Ancestral beings as persons have needs such as hunger, thirst, companionship, sexual desire, and so forth and therefore react according to their emotions and reason. Because these beings are often noncorporeal they depend on humans for some of their needs. Mesoamerican corporal persons provide noncorporeal persons with sustenance through the essence of offerings that maintain a pact as set forth in primordial interrelational reciprocal arrangements.[167] It is therefore within reciprocal actions amongst humans and nonhumans that Native American social relations are constituted.[168]

As noted in chapter 3, Redfield and Villa Rojas documented that deceased Maya transform into windlike beings that are related to a human's biological breathing.[169] Breath symbolism is highly important throughout the indigenous Americas as air is perceived to flow in and out of everything.[170] For this reason, humans as noncorporeal beings are capable of transforming into, for example, wind, clouds, butterflies,[171] and nonmaterial essences we categorize as ancestors.[172] Some of my Maya consultants consider the pixano'ob, airlike persons, as residing within bones and blood.[173] It is these air- or windlike persons that cause blood to pulse, and it is they that are released as a gas when bodies expire. Meskell and Joyce describe something similar to this for the Classic Maya in the following:

> Deceased individuals are depicted in monumental sculpture engaged in interactions with their living successors and descendants, and their agency continued to be acknowledged in texts long after their death . . . For people who identified invisible substances as fundamental parts of the materiality of the self, the disappearance of the flesh appears not to have held the horror that characterized the Egyptian attitude towards the partibility and putrefaction of the dead body.[174]

Implicit in Native American world views is that humans and nonhumans, be they visible or invisible, are not different in category of self and personhood.[175] Death equals life itself for the Maya,[176] and this concept is exhibited in the central Mexican cult of the dead that, as mentioned in chapter 6, is more appropriately seen as a cult of life.[177] Various ethnographers of Mesoamerica's indigenous peoples have in fact mentioned that death within these world views does not simply happen.[178] Death in ancient Mesoamerica was not in categorical

opposition to life and vice versa because all things, including persons, are eventually transformed. As Perrin noted, Wixárika ancestors mediate between the seen and unseen as their invisible world is nevertheless variably perceptible to human senses.[179] Death in Mesoamerica was not the end of a person's life on earth but a continuum in a different phase with which communication was possible through ritual objects. Mesoamerican invisible composite beings may reside in particular areas of the world, but they are free to roam about the entire cosmos. It is this cognitive orientation, based on communicating and interrelating with a great variety of noncorporeal persons, that gives Maya world views order, reason, and meaning.

The Relational Cosmos as a Cross-in-Bowl World

Our compass directions do not contribute to our understanding of Native American quadripartitioning. This indigenous concept seems based upon local spatial knowledge of region within which each community is set as place-within-space. The quad and center point is a conceptual vision of community that superficially might reflect a sort of cosmogram when looking at ancient Mesaomerican city layouts, but there is little actual evidence that building cities as cosmograms was a literal indigenous intent.[180] Is the quadripartitioning of place-within-space the same as cosmogram building? I do not think so. The Andean concept of Tawantinsuyu, Land of Four Quarters, for example, is related to the center and world directions as if emanating from the Inca city of Cuzco, but the world of the Inca, which was an extremely large empire, ran for the most part in a north to south vertical strip. Cuzco in effect was roughly in the vertical middle of this strip that ran from what is now Ecuador to Argentina on the west coast of South America. What kind of quadripartitioned view of the cosmos is this?

The indigenous American quad appears to be more of an iconic signifier concerned with community, region, and polity, if so organized, and therefore the center of an ethnocentric understanding of place-within-space. The indigenous objective here is not a scientific astronomical or mystical divine cosmogram of the universe. Indigenous American world views instead indicate a preoccupation with a cosmography linked to indexical forms found within their relational world views. Note that I do not here refer to cosmography as a scientific mapping but adapt it to describe a pre-European-contact cosmovision of the world composed of the sky, the ground, and the inner earth that, although separate,

are conceptualized as an interrelated whole where cosmology blends space and time.[181] Within these world views, then, the world's center and sides are often fluid horizons that meld into each other rather than being discrete points.

Which place or people are at the center of the world, according to this, is related to and dependent on claim of place within the known world. Leaders within these world views, it follows, as harbingers of stability in communication with the sun as well as with culture hero-type ancestral beings, understand themselves to bring health, wealth, might, and glory to their community and its allies. As Paxton suggests in relation to Maya directional systems and spatial organizations,

> some pre-Hispanic settlements in Yucatán could have served as regional symbols of the directions . . . defined in terms of the apparent annual motion of the Sun . . . Fundamental aspects of pre-Hispanic practices are continued by the descendents of those who built the settlements now in ruins, and accounts of contemporary rituals provide valuable clues to such concepts.[182]

Bernal-García states that Mesoamericans built their cities as if carving mountains within a bowl. Her suggestion indicates that Native Americans saw the world within an ethnocentric regional model.[183] Pointing persuasively in the direction of Mesoamerican regional worlds are the plates and bowls, such as one from Chalco, Mexico, depicting an encircled quad-cross motif flanked by four markers toward its corners and radiating directional lines at its center (see fig. 7.1). Furthermore, the Chalco example looks virtually identical to temporally and spatially distant Maya versions such as that found on Formative Salamá Valley, Guatemala, Monument 21 (fig. 7.15).[184]

Thompson stated that the Maya direction for center was represented by a yaax che,' green ceiba tree, and that the other four earth directions were also marked by trees that indexed abundance.[185] Roys later noted that the *Chilam Balam of Chumayel* mentions a *yaxcheel cab*, which he translates as "first tree of the world," and other ceiba trees, all associated with particular birds, as marking the world directions.[186] I am not convinced that Roys's glossing of yaxcheel cab as "first tree of the world" is correct. Che' in Mayan means tree, while cheel means rainbow, so the term could simply reference both as markers of the central direction rather than the tree as being yaax, as in first in importance. Regardless, cheel as the rainbow, that is, dependent on the sun and rain to be visible, associates the

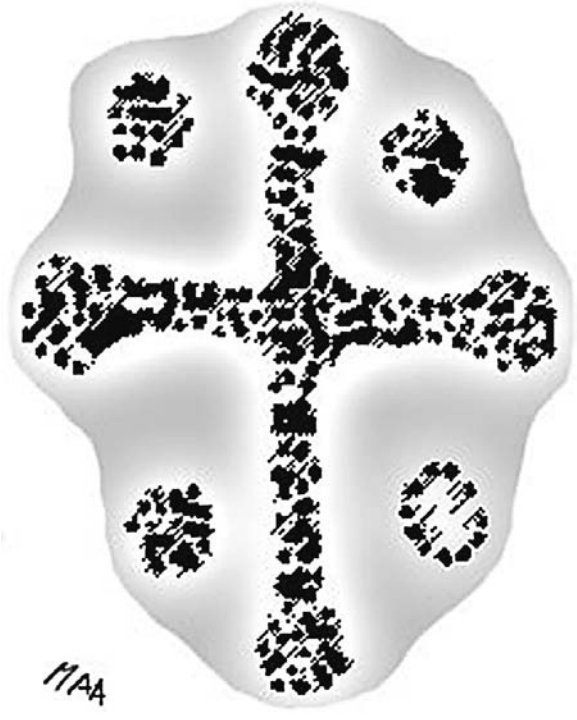


figure 7.15:
Salamá Monument 21 Quad-Cross.
ART GENERATED BY THE AUTHOR AFTER SHARER (1978:FIG. 11.3).

center direction to fertility and sustenance. The significance of the center directional tree and the associated quad-cross motif lends this imagery extremely powerful associations. As noted in chapter 2, to a certain degree elites appear to have exploited these notions, signified by the quad-cross icon, as representing their right to govern. The transformation and emphasis of this imagery, which the masses related to subsistence ritual production and sense of place, to patterns and conventions that sanctioned the governance by elites appears to have given rise to rulers claiming to be sunny-eyed kin of the sun.

Some Classic Maya rulers explicitly depict themselves, or related ancestors or other nonhumans, as having quadripartitioned eyes in reference to the sun's rays shining upon them and sanctioning their rulership. The region claimed as rightfully given to rule over by the sun can only be surmised, but the quad motif seems to encompass the visible horizons and all that the eye could see from the topmost pyramid. In this sense, the quad motif seems to have signified the domain of the polity in terms of the horizons as delineated by the sun's path and explains why it is so often seen on elite clothes and material objects. In agreement

with Headrick, "the ruler applies the cosmological symbols to his body to assert that he is the center of the universe and that all things revolve around him . . . He is symbolically the center of the world . . . suggesting that the ruler not only commanded horizontal space but also controlled vertical space."[187]

It thus follows that the sun was extremely important to elite rulership as practiced amongst many Native American groups. Dawn, solar zenith, and sunset with the ruler respectively greeting, aligning himself in the middle with, and then bidding rest to the sun would have been paramount to elite ideological claims legitimatizing their right to rule. Much Classic Maya imagery associated with rulers fixates on these sun-related themes and seems to demonstrate that the ruler aligned himself with the sun's daily journey. The most common way to claim this, it seems, was for rulers to commission imagery either depicting them as entering and exiting serpent-mouthed entryways or carrying a ceremonial bar that has serpent heads at each end,[188] both of which seem to associate the ruler's ritual productions with the movement of the ecliptic, equinoxes, and solstices.[189] This can be seen when rulers are depicted as a quad-cross motif, by their horizontal carrying of a sky–banded, double-headed-serpent bar at



figure 7.16: Yaxchilán Structure 14 Ball Court Marker.
PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR.

midtorso, encircled and marked by the four directions, such as that appearing on Yaxchilán's Structure 14 Ball Court Central Marker (fig. 7.16).[190]

Ball courts and their playing fields, as noted in chapter 6, seem to index an earthly female point of origin. Yaxchilan's Structure 14 ball court marker, for example, is centrally placed, orifice-like, and in the middle of the playing field within the sloping sides of the court. These holes of origin, previously linked to ancestors and other nonhumans, seem ubiquitous in many North American cosmologies. For the Maya many of these origin orifices are likened to be in quadripartite-flower form and linked to cavelike openings as depicted at Chalcatzingo (fig. 2.2 and Relief 1, according to Joralemon).[191] Quatrefoils are easy metaphors for the earth's vaginal clefts as even within our culture there exist many colloquial terms likening female genitalia to flowers. Quatrefoil flowerlike holes of emergence sometimes depict ancestors as if resting or emerging from what is represented as a cartouche-type icon.

Sometimes the cartouche is circular, like Yaxchilan's previously mentioned ball court marker. Here, the elite holds the double-headed serpent bar at midtorso. The imagery on this serpent bar shows the ecliptic traveling westward like the sun and thereby indexing the elite to quadripartitioning. The quadriform or quatrefoil cartouche is very much linked to the quad glyphs relating east and west to the sun (figs. 5.16 and 5.17). The quatrefoil indexes the place of earthly emergence and submergence for the ancestors and the sun and seems to have been especially linked as such during equinox- and solstice-related dawn, zenith, and sunset ritual ceremonies. Many a ritual production probably took place during these sun-related events at which times the rulers, perhaps more than usual, wore clothes and carried objects conspicuously displaying the quad-cross and crossed-banded motifs. One of these objects might have been either double-headed-serpent bars or staffs wrapped in cloth having quatrefoil-shaped flaps, like those displayed on Yaxchilán's Lintel 9.[192] The quatrefoil is conspicuous on the Altun Ha jade plaque.[193] On this object the quadriform icon seems to index a cleft into the earth, as a cartouche for ancestors, as well as a ruler's throne that together seem to mark nobles with legitimacy.

Quatrefoils have in common in their representations what has come to be called the quadripartite badge. This badge depicts a long-snouted, skull-like head, which in actuality is a bowl that has a k'iin sun glyph emblazoned on its forehead.[194] Above the skull-head bowl is often found a shell with a long, stingray spine and a side-turned bowl with crossed-bands that has emerging trilobed vegetation (fig. 2.21). According to Greene Robertson, as placed within

the quadripartite badge context, the shell indexes the underworld, the stingray spine the earth, and the crossed-bands the upper world.[195] These elements appear related to ancestor–manipulation-associated rituals by Classic period ritual intercessors since they are often exclusively depicted on deceased individuals. Schele associated the quadripartite icon with the sun's daily journey across the sky. As linked by Tate, the skull on the quadripartite badge may index Hunaphu's head being played with in Xibalba's ball court.[196] Hunaphu's head here represents the sun, and therefore any ancestors linked to the quadripartite badge were probably also associated with the sun.

Ontology and Personhood

J. Furst stated that Native American world views throw askew our studies of them since we base our understandings on Western scientific classifying, subdividing, and categorizing.[197] As Houston, Stuart, and Taube note, "The believing senses detected a supernatural world that was, to the Classic Maya, both 'natural' and pervasive. Spirits existed *materially* all around them, relict in stone and fully perceptible to human senses." To the Maya then, "a 'person' may not be a human being, nor is a human being always a person."[198] We know that for ancient Mesoamericans the last five days in their solar calendar were considered extremely vague days, and these seem related to personhood issues. Often cast as if unlucky, the last five days of the solar year, being odd within a 360-day count, seem concerned with the uncertainty and frailty of human relations with nonhuman persons. As Monaghan noted, any human born within those last five days was not considered to be a person.[199] As noted above, being an animate human individual does not equate personhood. Being human or nonhuman, visible or invisible, and animate or inanimate has little to do with personhood within non-Cartesian, relational world views.[200] Being a person has to do with social relations as the community bestows and acknowledges it. A Maya infant, as explained earlier, is not considered a person by many of my consultants until "it" goes through rituals that tether personhood onto its body. Personhood is evidenced by that child gaining character, volition, and personality; at that point, the child person needs to be relationally acknowledged as a willful and deliberate entity. The same can be done to wooden, ceramic, stone, animal, plant, and so forth.

Mesoamerican world views of being and personhood are ontologically based on social relations produced through ritual productions. To reiterate,

personhood within Mesoamerican world views, if not Native American as a whole, seems to be relationally centered and has to do with acknowledging visible and nonvisible beings as having character and volition, in other words, having the capacity to engage and participate and thereby be accepted as part of the community's collective whole. Fitting into these indigenous notions is one of the most prevalent Mayan hieroglyphs, read as *u-baah*, which has to do with a material image, or abstract representation of a being or person, or both.[201] According to Houston, Stuart, and Taube,

> baah [serves] as allusions to "images" that extend aspects of the "body" . . . [and] penetrates deeply into Classic Maya notions of portraiture and being . . . Evidence suggests a Maya understanding of representation that makes use of an extendible essence shared between images and that which is portrayed . . . The contention that such images are more than inert, inanimate objects fits with the interactive properties of some Maya sculptures, which exhibit a capacity for carefully staged interaction, even conversation, with flesh-and-blood actors.[202]

The world view exhibited in the above for the Maya is a relational one. Relational world views pertain not just to the Maya but also to the rest of the indigenous Americas. Native Americans as a whole tend to address nonhumans as ancestral persons. Personhood does not equate animism here. Schaefer and Furst, for example, recognize that Wixárika-Huichol world view is not what we call animistic.[203] Like most Native Americans, the Wixárika-Huichol see their ancestors as living around them and reference these nonhumans in kinship metaphors referencing "that which ties [them] to the earth."

The Wixárika, like most Native Americans, do not have a cosmology that is theologically based within notions of church. In accord with Lumholtz's insight, "religion is to them a personal matter, not an institution, and therefore their life is religious—from the cradle to the grave wrapped up in symbolism."[204] My work on Maya cosmology is not unique nor am I the only one to spell out the problems in defining Native American cosmologies within our Cartesian-derived categories; many scholars seem to recognize this at a cognizant and philosophical level. There typically remain, however, various problems within such acknowledgments, and these seem to be concerned with comprehension and method.[205] I cite the following as a blatant example, by an unidentified author, of acknowledging great epistemological differences in our categories and those

we study while then ignoring what was just admitted. The author says, "In the shamanic world of ancient Mesoamerica, no dichotomy exists between the natural and the supernatural. The body of the shamanic ruler through ritual meditation and transformation becomes the conduit depicted as the axis mundi, the conduit between the natural and supernatural . . . Those worlds could only be bridged and access gained to the supernatural through shamanic ritual claimed by Olmec rulers."[206] Excuse me?

In light of this quote, we clearly need more native concepts in our studies. Houston, Stuart, and Taube are helping lead the way concerning Maya imagery:

> The essential point is that these images communicated with human participants. This took place not so much through a theology of transubstantiation, which converts one substance into another. Instead, the connection results from shared ontological properties, in which sculpted stone attains a vitality like that of living actors . . . that stone "lives" or contains vital essence—that it contains the "body" of something else.[207]

The insight of these scholars, I believe, extends to not only stone objects but to all that is visible and invisible within Mesoamerican perceptions of how the self reflects, engages, and relates within their behavioral ecology. Understanding indigenous Mesoamerican senses of self requires comprehension as to how pre-European-contact North American peoples perceived their material and nonmaterial surroundings. Key to understanding these perceptions, being so ubiquitous in Native American narrative and imagery, are indigenous conceptions of plants, animals, weather, and astronomical objects as possible kin-related persons. The best way to analyze these concepts is in conjunction with the epistemologies conservative, indigenous-language–speaking, Native American ritual intercessors hold.

Many emblems of political office throughout the indigenous Americas seem related to the weather, ancestors, and fertility. The quad-cross motif appears to have been, and thus remains, the quintessential index tying indigenous Native American world views into coherent order. Sahagún noticed during the early colonial period that México leaders and native ritual specialists were likened to trees, related to a quadripartite sense of place, associated with agricultural abundance, and this seemed to be the impetus for granting administrators broader

authority.[208] Trees of sustenance metaphorically hold up the sky and in turn allude to zenith and the horizons as the sun's trajectory re-creates them on a daily basis. The branches of these trees reach into the sky where the sun passes and sky persons roam. These trees are seen as having great and powerful roots that penetrate deep into the world where earth and water persons live. These regenerative trees index never-ending sustenance and nourishment in that they penetrate deeply into the watery bowels of the earth. Extending across the earth, these trees' roots tap into all that rots and decomposes at the hands of putrid earth beings that gnaw at all that is fetid. Power and skills are variable amongst these earth beings, just as they are amongst humans.

The stinky, moody beings that live within the earth are what my j'meen consultants cajole or manipulate when they seek *sujuy ja'*, clean, pure water, inside caves or cenote sinkholes. The cajoling and manipulation of these multidimensional cave persons are required because they are quite powerful and skillful; it is these attributes that make caves ritually potent in the eyes of my ah k'iin and j'meen teachers. Note that a cave without a resident earth person is just a hole in the ground. Because some caves are ritually potent, however, made so by their association with invisible beings that reside within the bowels of the earth, they are useful training grounds for a j'meen's apprentice in how to deal with these earth lords. The j'meeno'ob slowly learn how to sense and gain more power over the earth lords and other entities that dwell within the dark recesses of the earth. The more powerful the j'meen, the more forms he or she can transform into, and this includes animate and inanimate material. Transforming, however, is not a precise term for what actually happens here. Powerful j'meeno'ob can supposedly tether themselves onto objects or animals that they can then control. Attaching oneself this way to a bird, for example, is one manner for my j'meeno'ob consultants to gain access into the sky. It is into the sky, of course, where great trees extend their giant branches, and it is within these branches that frolic all manner of life as if in a paradise setting. Note that within this world view, there is an earth with an associated underworld and upper world, though these regions are not discrete realms nor are they impermeable from one another.[209]

The paradise-like, rich life great Maya trees index is exhibited by hovering bees, hummingbirds, and butterflies as they freely roam to and fro, as explained briefly in chapter 4, amongst the highly fragrant quad-shaped flowers that sustain and feed them. These trees' giant, quad-branched roots absorb the organic material, including that of humans, that becomes fetid. The giant, four-directional roots of these trees spread under the earth, and it is through these roots that flow

into each tree a variety of beings that emerge and sit within clefts in the trees' branches. There are many ancient Mesoamerican images depicting humans or birds or both as if emerging from clefts in quad-like trees growing from skeletal material. This can be seen, for example, on ceramic plates and bowls or the Dresden (fig. 7.17) and Borgia (fig. 7.18) Codices.[210] Note that this is not a form of reincarnation nor does it take place within a kind of new-age vortex energy field. What my j'meeno'ob consultants describe is an ecological transformation. Noncorporeal persons simply tether themselves onto things already present throughout the Mesoamerican world. The more knowledgeable and skilled Maya j'meeno'ob can supposedly *k'aax naats'*, tether closely, their person onto an object of their choosing, and often this happens to a bird.

Many of my contemporary village Maya consultants attach certain meanings to specific birds and their chirping communication if they continually perch on certain trees at particular times of day and or night. Other researchers have sometimes called the birds the Maya so associate the souls of those specific trees, somewhat like, but not exactly, how my j'meeno'ob teachers describe them. Trees and birds, in this combination, share invisible persons between them as if they were one and the same. The relationship is centered on the bird tending to perch on the specific tree from which its associated person emerged. The bird, and in some cases a serpent or other animal, and the tree in effect symbiotically represent several conflated beings. The bird and the tree, in this combination, are thought of as a composite person from the world-view vantage of some of my j'meeno'ob consultants.



figure 7.17:
Dresden Codex Tree with Bird.
ART GENERATED BY THE AUTHOR.



figure 7.18:
Borgia Codex Tree with Bird.
ART GENERATED BY THE AUTHOR.

For example, I have Maya friends, who, failing to shoot a bird they think is threatening them, will simply cut down the tree that animal is associated with and achieve the same goal as if having shot the bird.

This serpent and tree association is not derived from Roman Catholicism's story of Genesis. Serpents in ancient Maya imagery are often shown as encircling both stelae and trees (fig. 3.2). The mention of serpents in association with trees in the Maya villages where I work readily brings forth animated conversations from my consultants regarding the X'taabay, female human-snake composite, creature linked with giant ceiba trees. The X'taabay is generally regarded as a

serpent person symbiotically linked to the ceiba tree that often shows itself to unwary men as a beautiful, voluptuous Maya woman. The association of specific birds and serpents with certain trees is common conversation amongst my j'meen consultants, and some of their stories are linked to ancestral auspices concerning the future of the Maya, as foretold by the stela-cross (fig. 4.1) mentioned in chapters 4 and 5.

The Cross-in-Circle as a Tree-in-a-Bowl and the K'uxan Suum

In my discussion of the stela-cross in chapter 5, I mentioned that the Kruz Tun monolith was regarded as a living plant person having four primary giant roots branching off in quad directions. I also mentioned that the Maya site of Copán has quad-cross-shaped foundations underneath some of its stelae (fig. 2.14). Konrad mentioned that some Maya villages with communicating cross shrines ritually replanted a ceiba tree within the center of bullrings.[211] Pohl, in addition, states that the ritual erection of a ceiba in the middle of a bullring is but a transformation of ancient Maya kuch-based festivities. She indicates that at these festivals the Postclassic Maya would tie a deer to the ceiba and then ritually kill it while so tethered.[212] I have documented similar actions the Maya practice in the states of Yucatán and Quintana Roo. The bullring festivities are derived from the Spaniards and have many Roman Catholic overlays. The villages where I work often have j'meeno'ob that produce many Maya ritual productions during these Spanish-influenced festivities.

Before the beginning of the bullfights, a yaax che,' ceiba tree, is cut and taken from the forest. Typically one of the j'meen ritual intercessors will tether a being onto the ceiba as it is planted, that is, erected, at the west-center point of the bullring so it can watch the fighting of the bulls in its honor. An important note here is that a nonhuman requires being ritually tethered onto the ceiba in order for it to get related to as a tree person. A ceiba is just a ceiba, that is, just a tree, unless it enters into some relational aspect as a person with humans. A ceiba in and of itself, that is, without a tethered invisible being, is otherwise just regarded as a tree that grows to immense size and sometimes has tufts of cotton. This is why a ceiba can be cut down as if it were any other tree. Note that other Native American nations have similar four-day rituals, notably the Sun Dance, where a poplar cottonwood tree is cut and replanted at center circle.[213] The connection between the poplar cottonwood and the ceiba, in terms of how they get cast within these rituals, seems to stem from the cloudlike cotton tufts that billow

at the ends of their branches. Note that in the Sun Dance, the Shoshoni-Crow treat and address the poplar cottonwood tree pole as if a person. Furthermore, they place specific importance on its fork, that is, its crotch, where just below they place a buffalo head, an eagle, eagle feathers, or a bundle-nest, since it signifies life and growth.[214]

The head or bird in the tree's crotch the reader will recall is reminiscent of my discussion concerning Mesoamerican depictions of heads or birds emerging or resting at the forks of trees, as in figures 6.7, 7.17, and 7.18. Note that the Ute and the Shoshoni are known during the ceremonies mentioned above to greet the sunrise with their right palm extended toward the sun while addressing it as a person.[215] For the Maya, the replanted ceiba person in the bullring is eventually terminated, dislocated and left to wither, and the being the j'meen tethered to it goes on its merry way. Before the deactivation of the ceiba in the ring, however, toward the end of these week-long festivities, thirteen bulls are ritually killed at sunset while tied to the ceiba (fig. 7.19). My j'meeno'ob consultants do the ritual killing of the bulls tied to the ceiba within the confines of the ring, which is virtually awash with blood throughout the bullfights. Three green



figure 7.19: Ritually Killed Bull Tied to a Ceiba Tree.
PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR.

crosses sometimes witness these events, with each cross having a pendant mirror that is said to act as its respective eye.

My j'meen consultants link these festivities to the communications by the stela-cross concerning the Mayan k'uxan suum (living-cord) legend. This legend is somewhat prophetic in that it relates to regional renewal and the once again future greatness of the Maya people. The k'uxan suum is likened to a rope-like, umbilicus birth cord the Maya describe as if dangling invisibly from the sky. Another Mayan word for rope is *k'aan*, and this is almost homophonous to their word ka'an, which means sky. The two words k'aan and ka'an are not true homophones in that, although very similar and hard for the outsider to distinguish, they do not actually sound exactly alike. Yucatek Mayan is distinct from other Mayan languages, there being approximately another twenty-four salient languages in this ethnic group, in that in addition to having a glottal stop, specified by an apostrophe (') in the words, it is also tonal, whereby vowel sounds are lengthened or shortened. Mayan is highly complex, where meanings can vary within very similar-sounding words that my consultants often interplay with one another when joking or when my j'meeno'ob consultants are producing indirect communication with nonhumans. My Maya j'meeno'ob consultants' narratives, orations, and other types of communication are generative and have a function of creating and feeding as if their words were sustenance in and of themselves.

Taking into account how the j'meeno'ob produce and perceive Mayan words, let me return to the k'uxan suum sky umbilicus. Several of my j'meeno'ob consultants tell very similar narratives about this sky umbilical cord in which they state that the Spanish *ts'uulo'ob*, foreigners, cut this great umbilicus at the city of Sakí when they attacked it, took it over, and established it as Valladolid. My Maya consultants state that although the wound to their k'uxan suum was quite severe, the cord was not severed. My consultants further state that once their k'uxan suum heals, the Maya will no longer be a poor, oppressed people. Jordan, in researching indigenous Maya midwifery in the Yucatán, indirectly provides links to these narratives from my consultants.[216] Some Maya midwives instruct their patients, while in labor, to reach above their hammocks and clutch on to what is described as an imaginary rope, an invisible umbilical cord, that is said to descend from the ceiling of Maya pole-and-thatch huts. The k'uxan suum narratives are widely known throughout the Yucatán Peninsula, where it is said that a Maya leader will be born, at the center of the Maya world, in relation to a cenote sinkhole in the approximate area of Chichén Itzá and

Sakí-Valladolid. This great event, it is said, will occur through direct influence of the k'uxan suum.[217]

My Maya consultants state that it is close to Sakí where a great Maya leader will emerge from their population. Because of the strength of this legend, my consultants prefer to call Sakí by its ancient identification rather than its colonial name of Valladolid. K'uxan suum indexes, as specific as this may seem, are found outside the Yucatán Peninsula and appear to be a common motif in pre-Columbian Maya imagery.[218] The cord is depicted either as a joining instrument by which lineage is demonstrated or in direct association with the upended-frog glyph that indicates birth.[219] K'uxan suum indexicality cuts across time and space in describing a great umbilicus connecting the sky, ground, and inner earth.[220] Tozzer, for example, references a quadripartite tree I consider linked to the k'uxan suum legend, saying, "A particularly apt specimen grew over a cenote in the Yucatán; although cut down it returned with four great branches identifying the four cardinal points. A hawk, the tree's spirit, lived in the topmost branches, its cry sukí, sukí. This became the settlement's name (Sacci, Zaqui); the Spaniards in 1543 simply changed it to Valladolid."[221] As noted previously, it is in the approximate area of Sakí-Valladolid that the k'uxan suum narratives of my Maya consultants pinpoint this umbilicus as being centered.

Paxton, in what I believe relates to this, suggests that the Maya world directions of the Yucatán center in the vicinity of Chichén Itzá and are related to its great cenote.[222] My j'meeno'ob consultants relate the k'uxan suum as being centered close to the cenote of Sakí, but these are technicalities that may matter more to us than to the Maya. The distance between Chichén Itzá and Sakí is twenty-five miles, and both get cut across a horizontal line running east to west along the sun's path. When my Maya consultants speak of the k'uxan suum, they do so in multiple metaphors that link the sky, ka'an, with rope, k'aan. As mentioned above, these two words can play off each other. My j'meeno'ob consultants do not stop here, however, and add three other homophone-like words to those above in their description of the great umbilicus. My j'meeno'ob consultants often add kaan, serpent, whereby the umbilicus is likened to a cordlike serpent that stretches and writhes variably above, across, and under the earth. The writhing of this sky serpent umbilicus is said as if to *pirin suut*, gyrate toward, the kan, four horizontal directions. In addition, this serpent is said to swing itself southward, *noojol*, from the sky toward the earth at chuumuk k'iin, midday, a direction that, befitting the sun's brilliance, my consultants associate with the color k'an, yellow.

My j'meeno'ob consultants have not stated that the k'uxan suum umbilicus is the ecliptic, but their manner of relating and speaking of it as if quadripartitioning the earth leaves little doubt that this is the sky phenomenon they are describing. Maya narratives linking the k'uxan suum umbilicus to the coming of a Maya leader sounds millenarian, in Messianic terms, and this may certainly play a part. If so adapted, however, Roman Catholic Messianism has been fit into a Maya cosmological framework and indigenized. The k'uxan suum, for example, is linked to the sun as well as to cenote-cave water *che'eno'ob*, wells, where the ancestors are said to dwell. Village water sources in the Yucatán are often designated as if pertaining to specific family compounds and therefore lineage assigned throughout generations. Most Maya villages in the Yucatán now have electricity in their communities and a central pump that dispenses underground water to most of the households. The che'eno'ob wells still get used every now and then, however, if the community's electrical supply or the water pump's motor is out of service.



figure 7.20: Sinkhole with Emerging Banana Plant.
PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF BRADLEY RUSSELL.

If a community's water service is not functional, the villagers must go to their designated well, and these are not always the ones nearest to their home. Because of familial-compound designation of water holes, some Maya villages occasionally enter into conflicts regarding access to this highly important resource. Other sources of conflicts are known to arise regarding cenotes, since, if large enough, the land surrounding them is also prime for growing banana trees and other valuable crops (fig. 7.20). Roys noted that the colonial Maya were known to enter into conflicts over cenote access not just because of their water supply but also because these bowl-like sinkholes served as prime locales for growing plants such as cacao as well.[223] Banana trees, like cacao, need a particular ecological environment in which to grow. In the scrubby forest of the Yucatán cenote sinkholes provide a mini ecological sphere amenable to particular trees and plants that flourish within their moist, cool microenvironments.[224] In addition, there are other plants that flourish within these cave sinkholes that the Maya do not use as food crops. Some of these plants are very large, tall trees with extremely wide root systems.

Besides the valuable crops grown in these sinkholes, there is certain prized game attracted to these microenvironments. Many of the avian type fly in-and-out and perch on the giant trees that emerge from within or cling to the limestone walls of the sinkholes. The ancient Maya could not have missed these giant trees, with their extensive and massive roots, jutting upward out of the bowl-like sinkholes. These trees seem to emerge from the watery inner earth as if thrusting into the sky. Also shooting out of some of these quad-linked sinkholes are bats. No surprise, then, that the ancient Maya depicted bats as if emerging from quadlike caves (fig. 7.21) as well as having cross-banded bones on their wings.[225] This tree-within-a-bowl complex is a year-round source of abundance as some of my consultants also plant maize within them. Considering this, I do not think it a coincidence that the ancient Maya depicted quadripartite plants and trees as linked to fertility and abundance as if within and emerging from a bowl (figs. 2.16 and 2.17). There is one ancient Maya vessel that ties these elements together by depicting a quad-cross maize plant, similar in many ways to the Foliated Cross at Palenque (fig. 2.13), as emerging with its perching birds from a quad-bowl earth (fig. 7.22). Maya bowls with the quad-cross motif are sometimes very elegant, while others are quite simple. Regardless of the creativity involved, this conspicuous icon signified a highly complex, rich concept whereby the cross-in-bowl served as a primary index complex for Mesoamerica at large.[226]

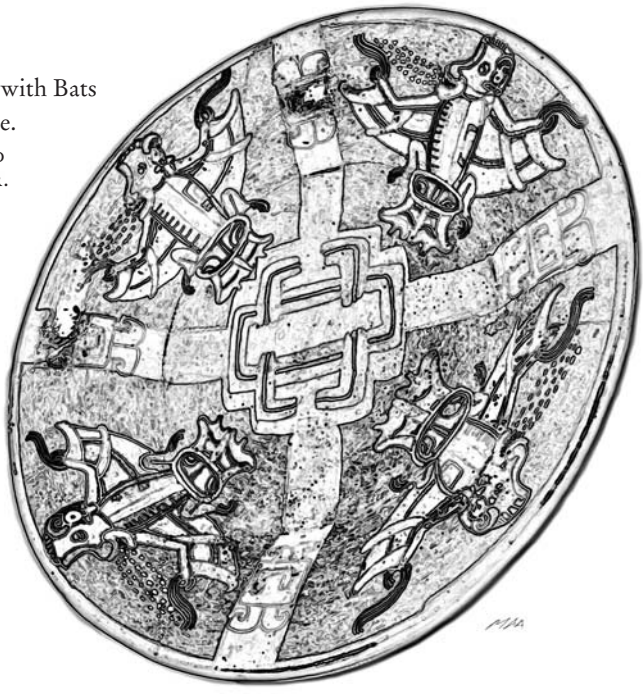


figure 7.21:
Balamku Plate with Bats and Quad-Cave.
ART GENERATED BY THE AUTHOR.



figure 7.22:
Maya Quad-Cross Corn Plant. Mérida Museum of Anthropology and History.
ART GENERATED BY THE AUTHOR.

A Cosmography in Index Form: Diffuse and Protean Hybridization of the Quad Motif

Redfield and Villa Rojas noted that Maya quadripartitioning was related to crosses and rain.[227] As discussed in chapter 5, the stone-cross at Chuumuk Lu'um is where the Chaako'ob rain beings are said to converge. The compiled data within this work indicate that the pre-Columbian quad motif was related to weather, fertility, sense of place, and ancestral beings. There is great artistic variability as to the depiction and the material on which the quad motif is displayed throughout the indigenous Americas, and its meaning has often been overlooked. Headrick notes how important the indexical set of the quad motif and bowl is within Mesoamerican iconography:

> Were it not for their archaeological context, the simplicity of the K'axob cross bowls might result in their being overlooked . . . yet their simplicity is deceiving, for the concepts that they convey are complex. Through the cross, these vessels manage to express the core ideology of the Mesoamerican belief system . . . To equate style and quality with the ability to fully comprehend the import of symbols would be to miss the function of these symbols in smaller, rural sites in Mesoamerica . . . One might presume that the non-elites of K'axob were also fluent in the visual vocabulary of Mesoamerica as the manipulation of these symbols could not have been effective if it were not understood by an audience.[228]

Elite Mesoamerican ideology was primarily directed toward their immediate subordinates and by extension, the masses they ruled over. We know through the historical hieroglyphic inscriptions that elites sometimes hosted dignitaries from other cities. Alliances, intermarriage, and trade among the ancient cities also included other types of visitors or the relocation of people from one community to another. The indexical set of the quad motif must have played an important role, as each city's inhabitants claimed their community as the zenith center point within their quadrilateral horizons. The inhabitants at each center point would have then made the claim, as based on a genealogy of ancestors, home, and place, to the region and its related resources. This scenario appears to have happened not at one Formative Mesoamerican community but many. The cross-in-bowl index complex appears to be based on ancient cosmological world views the masses shared, albeit mostly elusive in the archaeological record, and later elaborated upon by elites.[229] The quad-cross motif was adapted

multiregionally as a very powerful index that informed and transformed, both spatially and temporally, individuals and groups within the ancient Americas.

Today, the villages in Quintana Roo are prospering as the result of direct and indirect tourist impact. Most of this is felt through wages earned in migrant construction jobs. Young Maya men migrate to and from their village to their weekly job sites along the Caribbean coast. Despite this, at least so far, many of my Maya consultants remain focused on practical and productive actions that deal with the here and now. The cosmology of my Maya consultants seeks quick responses from that which surrounds them. The behavioral world of my Maya consultants is composed of many nonhuman persons that make their presence known in a variety of ways throughout the home, village, and forest. What is to me, without a doubt, dealing with supernatural forces is not so for many of my Maya consultants; this does not mean that they are confused, superstitious, or illogical. Having the slightly alcoholic baalche' honey mead, distilled liquor, and cases of beer in a Maya shrine, what I at first thought sacrilegious behavior, makes total sense in a relational world view. Mayan green crosses and other communicating objects are active participants in Maya life, and they not only want company and food but also like to toss back a few shots of liquor. Throughout this study, I have noted that my Maya consultants' actions are based on reciprocation with nonhuman persons that have needs and desires just like their human counterparts. Nonhuman persons are seen neither as extraordinary nor out of this world. What is uncommon, sacred, and mystical to me is quite common, daily interactive, and experiential for many of my Maya consultants.

My point in this work has certainly not been to compare the contemporary Maya with the ancient as if no changes have taken place: they have and great ones at that. Having said that, I note that for many of my Maya consultants their ancestors' cosmology is still viable. My Maya consultants do not need to be running around with feathers in their hair and building pyramids to demonstrate continuity to those who champion change in terms of invented traditions for all except their own. If I seemed to go far too easily from one period into another, it was to make specific points and not, I hope, out of imprudence. Sahlins has claimed that in change there is continuity, as one cannot happen without the other.[230] I could not agree more. My ethnoarchaeological narrative in this work has been concerned with a historical anthropology, that is, culture history linked with the cultural dimensions of others and their contingent and transformed world, and the iconology of core Mesoamerican indexes. There is no denying that today's Maya peoples are historically constructed. Which

culture or tradition is not? Maya historical traditions have been millennia in the making. Maya crosses and their associated cosmological context are not the same as those found in the Latin Roman Catholic cross and crucifix. The cultural constructions, in the past and into the future, of Maya and Euro-Christian crosses are not and cannot be the same, though they may be similar at times.

My Maya consultants tell stories about their ancestors and their crosses to get meaning across concerning the nonhuman persons whose presence they sense through their smelling, hearing, and feeling. Nonhuman persons surround many of my Maya friends, and these entities are locatable around their quadripartitioned sky, ground, and inner earth. The Maya j'meen can cure, if so specialized, because he or she has the ability to evoke, seek out, and bring forth ancestors and other nonhuman persons in order to consult with them. This is often done through their communicating objects, and such is the relational world view of the Maya j'meen ritual intercessor.[231] My Maya j'meen consultants are not devoid of agency and are not colonial by-products. A Maya cross is often not just a cross and certainly not a Christian one. The contemporary Maya speak of their cross icons as *k'atab*, which means cross shaped or cross-angled. Communicating cross objects are sometimes called k'atab che,' wooden cross object, or *k'atab tuun*, for stone cross objects, such as the Kruz Tun (fig. 4.1) stela-cross monolith. Some of my j'meen consultants sometimes specify that their icons are sometimes made of *k'at*, which refers to ceramic paste. The many and elaborate Mayan communicating crosses, trees, stones and other objects are a statement not only to their varied but similar significant presence, but to their enduring strength and complex development before, during, and after the colonial-era. Maya, Mesoamerican, and Native American world views as a whole share much in common and tend to be nonbinary, inclusive, experiential, and relational.

NOTES

Preface

1. Bastarrachea, Yah Pech, and Briceño Chel 1994, 6; Blair 1964.

Chapter 1

1. Ruz 1977; Marcus 1978; Flannery 1976; Hendon and Joyce 2004.
2. See Smith 1962; Dubuisson 2003; Fitzgerald 2000; Leuba 1901; Tweed 2005.
3. Fitzgerald 2000, 9; McCutcheon 1997, 3–26.
4. See Durkheim [1912] 1965, 59; Flood 1999, 44; Tambiah 1990, 4.
5. Hocart [1936], 256; Sahlins 1985, 35n3, 78n5, 103, 121–22, 143.
6. Evans-Pritchard 1956, vii.
7. Radin [1927] 1957, 260.
8. See Bourdieu 1977.
9. See Durkheim [1912] 1965.
10. See Hallowell 1967, 1976 (1960); Graham 2009; Kehoe 2000; Knab 2004, 22–23; Konrad 1991, 136; McAnany 1995; J. Furst 1995, 173–84; Monaghan 1998; Morrison 1992, 2002; Read 1998; Schaefer and Furst 1996, 12, 24.
11. Hocart [1936] 1970, 36, 256; Sahlins 1985, 26–35, 102–3; Turner 1967, 271–72.
12. Eliade 1976, 21, 137–38, 142, 146; 1990, 107.
13. Boas 1896.
14. Beattie 1964, 203; Bell 1992, 13–17, 69–72; Goody 1977, 27–29, 32–35; Klass 1995.
15. See Renfrew 1972, 496; Garwood et al. 1991, v–ix; Hodder 1995, 98.
16. See Rice 2004, xviii.
17. See Coe 1993.
18. See Justeson et al. 1985.
19. See Kirchoff 1943.
20. See Kubler 1961; Ricard 1966.
21. See Fischer 1999.
22. Hunt 1977, 247–83.
23. See Boone 1998, 4–5; Gillespie 1998, 233.
24. Culbert 1988, 69.
25. See Fernández Repetto 1984, 44.
26. Roys 1965b, 659.
27. Bastarrachea, Yah Pech, and Briceño Chel 1994, 1.
28. Bonfil Batalla 1996, 23, 25.
29. See Restall 1997, 1998.

30. Bastarrachea, Yah Pech, and Briceño Chel 1994.
31. See Reed 1964, 156.
32. See Bonfil Batalla 1996, 27–28; J. Furst 1995, 181–82.
33. See Garwood et al. 1991, v–ix; Hodder 1995, 92–97.
34. See Beattie 1963, 29, 1966, 1970; Evans-Pritchard [1937], 478–10; 1976, 30; Goody 1961, 151, 1962, 36–37; Styers 2004, 21, 146; Van der Leeuw 1933, 24–25, 545–46.
35. See Durkheim [1912] 1965; Goody 1961, 154.
36. See Durkheim [1895] 1982, 50–59; Bell 1992, vii; Goldenweiser 1917; Pals 2006, 111–14; Spiro 1971.
37. Paxton 2000, 15.
38. See Astor-Aguilera 1998, 2000, 2004.
39. See Astor-Aguilera 2009.
40. See Hodder 1982.
41. Buikstra and Nystrom 2003, 44–45; Jones 2005; Meskell and Joyce 2003, 67–78.
42. Brody 1997; Scarre 1994, 81; Thomas 2007.
43. Durkheim[1912] 1965, 52, 62.
44. See Graham 2009; Monaghan 2000; Pharo 2007, 29; Renfrew 1994, 47–48; Spiro 1971, 87.
45. See Frazer [1911–15] 1922; Freud [1913] 1950; Hertz [1909] 1973; Lévi-Strauss [1949] 1969; Malinowski 1922; Mauss [1925] 1967; Otto [1923] 1958; Radcliffe-Brown [1922] 1964; Tylor [1871] 1903.
46. See Eliade 1959, 1974, 1976, 1990.
47. See Kehoe 2000, 1–6, 37–40, 45, 48; Leach 1966; Saliba 1976, 110–18; Sidky 2008, 4–7, 12–16, 114, 137, 205–6; Wallis 2003, 35–38.
48. Eliade 1985, 18, 23.
49. Eliade 1990, 55.
50. Wheatley 1971, 417; see also 1969.
51. Eliade 1958, 375.
52. Eliade 1976, 145.
53. See Astor-Aguilera 2004.
54. Kehoe 2000, 1–6, 37–45, 100–102.
55. See Eliade [1951] 1964.
56. See Furst 1965, 1976, 1994; Freidel, Schele, and Parker 1993; Freidel and Schele 1988; Hultkrantz 1992; Madsen 1955; Pasztory 1982; Reilly 1989.
57. See Weber 1949; Weber 1978, 4–7, 20–22.
58. See Wallis 2003.
59. See Sidky 2008.
60. Gibson 1997, 50–52; Hutton 2001, 114–15; Maskarinec 1995, 97; Mironov and Shirokogoroff 1924.
61. See Kehoe 1996, 2000; Klein et al. 2002, 2005; Klein and Stanfield-Mazzi 2004.
62. Eliade [1951] 1964, 3–6, 169, 194, 224, 259.
63. Ridington and Ridington 1975, 192.
64. Shirokogoroff 1923; 1924; 1935, 269, 271–74.
65. Sidky 2008, 209.
66. Eliade 1976, 21.
67. Eliade 1976, 137–38.
68. Eliade 1976, 142.

69. Eliade 1990, 107.
70. Eliade 1976, 142.
71. Eliade 1976, 146.
72. Carmack 1988, 49.
73. Schaefer and Furst. 1996, 12–13.
74. See also Sosa 1988, 1989.
75. J. Furst, 173–184; see Stanzione 2003, 229 as a prime example.
76. See Brandt 1996, 51; Deloria Jr. 2006.
77. See López 2006; Ortiz 1975; Swentzell 1993.
78. Basso 1970, 36.
79. Monaghan 1995, 98–102.
80. See Dubuisson 2003, 5.
81. See Foucault 1970, 1972.
82. Stanzione 2003, 68–75, 82–86, 163–64, 216, 219–22, 229–30.
83. See Battiste and Youngblood Henderson 2000, 80–81; Brandt 1996, 52.
84. See Hallowell [1960] 1976, 366; Klass 1995, 26.
85. See also Basso 1970, 36; Klass 1995, 30; Shorter 2003, 198.
86. See also Beatie 1964, 203; Morrison 2000, 25–26.
87. See also Basso 1996, 48; Kluckhohn 1974, 179.
88. See in part Monaghan 1995, 11–14, 80–81, 85–93; Read 1998, 145, 147, 151–54, 175, 183, 187.
89. See also Basso 1996, 38; Bird-David 1999, 73; Hallowell [1960] 1976; Klass 1995, 28–29; Morrison 1992, 207; 2002, 38, 42–43; Shorter 2003, 197.
90. See in part Monaghan 1995, 238, 318.
91. See Basso 1970, 36; Morrison 2002, 10; Nabokov 2002, 238–40.
92. Bell 1992; Goody 1977.
93. See Monaghan 1998.
94. Tweed 2005, 254; see also Harvey 2005, xv–xvi, 130–31, 135.
95. Bell 1992, 140.
96. See Turner 1967, 272–73.
97. See Bell 1992, 221–22; Bourdieu 1977, 171.
98. See Bell 1992, 92, 140–41; Klass 1995, 32; Monaghan 1998.
99. Morley and Brainerd 1956; Sharer 1994, 513–14.
100. Durkheim 1965 [1912], 39–43; Goody 1961, 151.
101. Holly 1993, 17.
102. Lavin 1993, 33.
103. Panofsky 1983 [1955], 14, 17f, 22.
104. Mitchell 1987, 38.
105. Freidman 1994, 75; Carmack 1996, 80–121.
106. See Foster 1944.
107. See Coe 1973.
108. See Coe 1989.
109. See Robicsek and Hales 1978.
110. See Coe 1973, 22; Coe 1978, 11–14.
111. Houston and Stuart 1989; Grube 1989.
112. See Gossen 1994.
113. Nicholson 1976, 162–63.

114. See Sharer 1994, 69.
115. Houston, Chinchilla, and Stuart 2001, 3–23.
116. See Proskouriakoff 1978, 113; Thompson 1950, 295.
117. Houston, Chinchilla, and Stuart 2001, 3, 7; López Austin 1980, 50–51; Schele 2002, 21.
118. Astor-Aguilera 2009.
119. See Barrera Vásquez 1980.
120. See Astor-Aguilera 2009.
121. See Rice 2004, 286.
122. See Feeley-Harnik 1985, 276–78.
123. See Rice 2004, 289.
124. See Houston 2000, 173; Rice 2004, 283.
125. Rice 2004, 285; Webster 1976, 813–15.
126. Agnew 1987; 1989, 9, 13.
127. See Astor-Aguilera 2009.
128. See McAnany 1998, 292.
129. Houston, Stuart, and Taube 2006, 123.
130. McAnany 1995, 27–47.
131. Tedlock 1985, 113–15, 143–47, 153.
132. Meskell and Joyce 2003, 143.
133. See Rice 2004, 284.
134. Houston and Stuart 1996, 289–90.
135. See Goody 2004, 58–60.
136. See Coulombe 2003; De Rosa 2000; Duffy 2002.
137. See Houston and Stuart 1996, 289.
138. See Escobedo 2004, 279; Houston 2004, 271–75.
139. See Astor-Aguilera 2009.
140. See Demarest 2004, 176.
141. See Miller and Martin 2004, 65; Schele and Freidel 1990.
142. See Demarest 1992, 2; Demarest and Conrad 1992; Sharer and Ashmore 1987, 406.
143. Demarest 2004, 176; Houston 1996.
144. Miller and Martin 2004, 172–73.
145. See Bell 1992, 85, 191; Bourdieu 1977, 178–79; Broda 1987, 67, 108; Comaroff 1985, 4–6; Mann 1986, 2–3; Therborn 1980, vii; Thompson 1984, 14, 17, 34.
146. See Moxey 1993, 27.
147. Hunt 1977.

Chapter 2

1. Joralemon 1976.
2. See Taube 1995; Schele 1995.
3. See Raghavendra 2000.
4. See Holland, Roberts, and Liscum 2009.
5. See Blake 1991; Clark and Blake 1994.
6. See Marcus and Flannery 1996, 87; Winter 1976.
7. See Justeson and Kaufman 1993, 1997.
8. See Grove 1996.

9. See Joralemon 1996.
10. Freidel 1995, 8–9.
11. McAnany 1995, 57–58, 85–86.
12. See Storey 2004.
13. See McAnany 1995, 57, 61–63; Fowler 1984; Robin 1989; Schele 1984; Sharer 1978; Welsh 1988, 171.
14. Chase 1990, 207; 1997, 25–26; Chase and Chase 2004, 203–4; Storey 2004, 114.
15. See McAnany 1995; 1998, 272; Demarest 2004, 176.
16. See Godelier 1978.
17. Maurice Godelier, personal communication to author, 2005.
18. See somewhat similar in Helms 1998.
19. McAnany 1995.
20. McAnany 1998; Freidel, Schele, and Parker 1993, 278–79; Harrison 1997, 133–39; Chase and Chase 1994; 1996, 77.
21. See Lorenzen 2003.
22. See Tozzer 1941, 113–21; Schele and Freidel 1990; Freidel, Schele, and Parker 1993, 204–7, 445–47; McAnany 1995.
23. See Demarest 1992b; 2004, 176; McAnany 1995; Freidel, Schele, and Parker 1993; Schele and Miller 1986.
24. Astor-Aguilera 2004, 175–84, 253–56; Monaghan 1998b, 143; McAnany 1995, 65.
25. McAnany 1998, 271, 273
26. Similar in Gillespie 2001; 2002, 70.
27. McAnany 1995, 1998, 2004.
28. McAnany, Storey, and Lockard 1999.
29. See Holland et al. 1998, 49–65.
30. See McAnany 1998, 274.
31. Holland and Cole 1995, 476.
32. See McAnany 1995, 164.
33. McAnany 1995, 164.
34. See Friedrich 1989, 301.
35. Freidel 1995, 3, 5.
36. See Schele and Freidel 1990.
37. McAnany 1995, 125–27.
38. Furst 1973, 114–15; Mountjoy 1998; Smith 1995.
39. Beekman 2003.
40. Beekman 2003, 302–3, 313; see Von Winning and Hammer 1972, fig. 50.
41. See Anawalt 1998, fig. 1.
42. See Jones and Satterthwaite 1982, fig. 23.
43. Rice 2004, 283.
44. Schele and Freidel 1990, 91 fig. 2.15; Stuart 1996, 160.
45. Newsome 2001, 31–33, 52.
46. Tate 1992, 67.
47. Schele and Freidel 1990, 71.
48. See Justeson and Mathews 1983.
49. See Hammond 1982.
50. See Baudez 1991, 88; Newsome 1998, 125; Stromsvik 1942.
51. See Schele and Freidel 1990.

52. Newsome 1998; 2001, x–xvii.
53. Newsome 2001, 69, 159, 162.
54. Newsome 2001, 59–60.
55. Stuart 1996, 156.
56. Newsome 2001, 151.
57. Newsome 2001, x.
58. Hammond 1982; Justeson and Mathews 1983; Newsome 2001; Stuart 1996; Schele and Freidel 1990.
59. Stuart 1996, 150–52.
60. Stuart 1996, 153–56.
61. Justeson and Mathews 1983; Schele and Freidel 1990.
62. See Grube 1990; Justeson and Mathews 1983; Stuart 1996.
63. See Hammond 1982.
64. Newsome 2001, 10–12.
65. Headrick 2004.
66. Headrick 2004, 370–71; see Reilly 1994.
67. Headrick 2004, 374.
68. Headrick 2004, 373.
69. See Lombardo de Ruiz 1987.

Chapter 3

1. See Carmack 1981; Chase 1986; Fox 1987; Byland and Pohl 1994; Pohl 1994, 19–41; Masson 1999, 2000.
2. Gillespie 1998, 233.
3. Gillespie 1998, 255.
4. See Masson 2000, 47, 249–50; Sharp 1981, 3–4.
5. Boone 1998, 4–5, 7.
6. Gillespie 1998, 256.
7. See Headrick 1999.
8. Lorenzen 2003.
9. Marilyn A. Masson, personal communication to author, 2004.
10. Newsome 2001, 17.
11. Masson 2000, 259.
12. Masson 2000, 24.
13. Lorenzen 1999, 101; Masson 2000, 256–57, 260; Proskouriakoff 1962, 107.
14. Gann 1926, 53, 65; Masson 2000, 209, 250–51; Proskouriakoff 1962.
15. Masson 2000, 209.
16. Stuart 1996, 152; Masson 2000, 258, 277–76.
17. Stuart 1996, 154, 158.
18. Villagutierre Soto-Mayor 1983, 303, 315.
19. Cowgill 1963, 47; George Cowgill, personal communication to author, 2003.
20. See Newsome 2001, 24.
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66. See Byland and Pohl 1994, 193–202, 206–8; Headrick 1999, 75–79; J. Furst 1986, 62; Múnera Bermúdez 1991, 335–39; Pohl 1994, 26–41, 70–77, 81–82; Séjourné 1966b, 219; Stenzel 1972, 348, 351.
67. See Burgoa 1934, 1:372; Pohl 1994, 75, 83–93; Torquemada [1615] 1971, 299–300.
68. See Bullchild 1985, 286; Chamberlain 1982; McClintock 1935, 6, 14; Reeves 1993; Wissler 1912, 1920.
69. See Cobb, Maymon, and McGuire 1999, 175, 178; Emerson 1989, 66; Griffin 1966; Howard 1968, 28–40, 46–50, 58–60, 88, 104, 127, 150, 153; Purdy 1996, plates 49–51.
70. Bird 1992, xvii–xx.
71. See Galloway 1989, 101–8.
72. See Knab and Sullivan 1994, 22, 86, 241.
73. See Boone 1989, 26–27; Byland and Pohl 1994, 219; Caso 1962, 126; Durán 1971, 72, 121–22; 1964, 208; Headrick 1999, 71; Miller 1991, 221; Pastor 1987, 26; Pohl 1994, 20; Townsend 1979, 34–36.
74. Jones 2005, 212.
75. See Masson 2000, 202, 224, 229, 237.
76. See Proskouriakoff 1962b.
77. See Masson 2000, 202–3, 229.
78. See Freidel, Schele, and Parker 1993, 189–90.
79. See Tate 1992, 203–6.
80. Personal communication to McAnany 1998, 276.
81. See Masson 2000, 204, 210.
82. See Brown 1982.
83. Thompson 1970, 198; McGee 1990, 51; see Vogt 1970, 13–14.
84. Beals 1945, 85.
85. Morley and Brainerd 1956, 225.
86. See De La Torre 2004, 11.
87. See also J. Furst 1995, 181–84.
88. See Landa in Tozzer 1941, 111, 131; Roys 1972, 27–28.
89. Edmonson 1986, 187.

90. See Hutton 1996.
91. See Wroth 1982, 183.
92. See Stuart 1996, 156–59.
93. See also Redfield and Villa Rojas [1934] 1962, 177–78, 372.
94. Roys 1965, 4.
95. See Roys 1933, 98–107.
96. See Carmack 1981, 63.
97. See Mendelson 1958, 123.
98. See Broda 2004.
99. See Taube 1985, 1992.
100. See Gann and Thompson 1931, 126.
101. See Redfield and Villa Rojas [1934] 1962; Sosa 1988; Love 1989; Astor-Aguilera 2004.
102. Gann and Thompson 1931, 249.
103. Astor-Aguilera 2004, 180, 194.
104. López Austin 1997, 24–25, 30.
105. Nash 1970, 198.
106. Sahagún 1932, 26, 39.
107. See Kearney 1972; Sandstrom 1991, 269–73, 301–22; Morayta Mendoza 1997.
108. See also Gann and Thompson 1931, 248–50.
109. See Astor-Aguilera 2004, 178.
110. Tedlock 1985, 113.
111. See Prechtel and Carlsen 1988.
112. Furbee 1996.
113. See Astor-Aguilera 2011.
114. Schele and Mathews 1998, 207; see also Gutiérrez 1993; Schele and Freidel 1991.
115. See Prechtel and Carlsen 1988; McCafferty and McCafferty 1991; Schevill 1993, 64–65.
116. Furst 1996, 58n1.
117. Bierhorst 1990, 182–84; 1992, 146–47.
118. See Taube 1993, 37–39, 62–67.
119. See Sandstrom 1991.
120. See also Freidel, Schele, and Parker 1993, 181; Gossen 1986, 243; 1974, 228–29; somewhat similar in Monaghan 1995, 221n5.
121. See Astor-Aguilera 2011.
122. See Tedlock 1985, 114.
123. See Wissler 1912, 1920; McClintock 1935, 6, 14; Mendelson 1956, 1958; Séjourné 1966b, 219; Stenzel 1972, 348, 351; López Austin 1980, 78; Chamberlain 1982; Carmack and Mondloch 1983, 185; Bullchild 1985, 286; Tedlock 1985, 198; J. Furst 1986, 62; Schele and Miller 1986, 72; Múnera Bermúdez 1991, 335–39; Freidel, Schele, and Parker 1993, 416; Reeves 1993; Byland and Pohl 1994, 193–202, 206–8; Pohl 1994, 26–41, 70–77, 81–82; Carlsen 1997, 80–81; Headrick 1999, 75–79.
124. See Harrison 1999, 96–98.
125. See Grube and Schele 1994; Harrison 1999, 134, 137–39.
126. See also Astor-Aguilera 2004, 172–82.
127. See Eshelman 2001, 274–76.
128. Astor-Aguilera 2004, 177–79.
129. See Becker 1992.
130. Harrison-Buck 2004, 65–66.

131. See Chapman 2000.
132. See also Knab 2004, 9.
133. See Gill 1982, 11.
134. See Morrison 1992; 2002, 6.
135. See Astor-Aguilera 2004; Sandstrom 1991, 300.
136. Houston and Stuart 1996, 302.
137. Meskell and Joyce 2003, 138.
138. Miller and Martin 2004, 20.
139. Morrison 2002, 6.
140. See Houston and Stuart 1996, 302–7.
141. See Astor-Aguilera 2004.

Chapter 7

1. Turner 1967, 271–72.
2. Hallowell [1955] 1967, 79.
3. See Howard 1968.
4. Redfield [1953] 1957, 91.
5. See Arnold 2005; Klass 2003, 33–36, 94–95, 111–12; Lakoff 1996; Radcliffe-Brown [1940] 1952, 189, 193–94; Zeddies 2000.
6. See Gell 1998, 96–154.
7. Jones 2005, 197–98.
8. López Lujan 2006, 152.
9. See Turner 1982, 16.
10. See Sahlins 1981, 6–7.
11. See, in part, Jones 2005, 216–17.
12. Brody 1997, 12.
13. See Gell 1998; Jones 2005, 196, 208; Strathern 1988; Turner 1982, 17, 20–21, 23–25.
14. Weiner 1995, xiv.
15. Guess 2004, 7, 32.
16. McAnany 1995.
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21. See Gossen 1974, 29; Burkhart 1989, 61–63; Taube 2003.
22. See Gossen 1974.
23. See Stark 1999, 310–11.
24. Redfield 1962, 270.
25. Stone 1995, 16.
26. Eliade 1990, 107.
27. Gossen 1974.
28. See Roys 1967; Thompson 1934, 220.
29. Brotherston and Ades 1975, 293.
30. Tichy 1976, 116.
31. Landa in Tozzer 1941, 133; Pío-Pérez 1864, 368–71.

32. See also Paxton 2001, 15–16.
33. See Alvarez 1980, 120; J. Furst 1995, 181–82; Martínez Hernández 1929, 235.
34. See Tate 1992.
35. Hallowell 1976, 367.
36. Turner 1967, 264.
37. See also Freidel, Schele, and Parker 1993, 100–101.
38. See also Sosa 1986, 187.
39. See Jones 2005, 208, 214.
40. See Coe 1975, 20.
41. See Thompson 1960, 11.
42. See Sosa 1986, 195.
43. Schele 1977, 43–48.
44. Headrick 2004.
45. See also Sosa 1986, 195.
46. Freidel, Schele, and Parker 1993, 320–22, fig. 7.25.
47. J. Furst 1995, 177–78.
48. See Soustelle 1940, 85.
49. See Klein 1975, 82.
50. See Andrews 1975; Aveni 1980, 218–316; Blom 1924; Bricker 1983; Rupert 1940; Tate 1992, 114–15.
51. In Tozzer 1941, 136–39.
52. See Aveni 1980, 154–57; León-Portilla 1988; 1968, 65–66; Paxton 2001, 16; Villa Rojas 1988; 1968, 133.
53. See Matos Moctezuma 1992, 193; Taube 1986, 71.
54. Peterson 1959, 131.
55. Broda 1991, 84.
56. Caso 1958, 60; Sullivan 1972, 213.
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58. Thompson 1960, 112, 145, 251; see also Ashmore 1989, 273.
59. Thompson 1960, 111, 252, 276.
60. Klein 1975, 74.
61. See Chapman and Crites 1987.
62. See Crown and Hurst 2009.
63. See Howard 1968; Waring 1968.
64. Kitt Chappell 2002, 159, fig. 116.
65. Power 2004, 44.
66. Kitt Chappell 2002, 60, fig. 50.
67. See Emerson 1989; Power 2004; Cobb, Maymon, and McGuire 1999.
68. Kitt Chappell 2002, 54–55, fig. 46.
69. See Bullen 1966; Kehoe 1992, 171; Sears 1977, 1982.
70. See Waring 1968, 39.
71. See Beekman 2003; Schele and Miller 1986; Stross 1994, 15, 21–25.
72. See Bradley 2000; Edmonds 1999; Jones 2005; McAnany 1998; Tilley 1994.
73. Jones 2005, 216.
74. See Roland 1988.
75. Perrin 1996, 421.
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77. Perrin 1996, 411, 414.
78. See Anguiano Fernández 1996, 380; Preuss [1907] 1996, 113, 118, fig. 19.
79. Jones 2005, 199.
80. See, in part, Brück 2001; Fowler 2000, 2004; Jones 2005.
81. See also Astor-Aguilera 2009.
82. See Clayton 2009.
83. Fogelson and Walker 1980, 99; see also Fogelson 1982, 76.
84. See also Brown 1975; Howard 1968, 17; Pernet 1992, 117–35, 162.
85. See J. Furst 1995; López Austin 1988, 1:340; Schaafsma 1999, 184.
86. Otto [1923] 1950.
87. See Harvey 2005, 12, 18–19, 27–28, 109–12, 127.
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91. See Codex Mendoza 1992, 209, 13v, 44r.
92. See also Freidel and Schele 1989; Vogt 1969, 235, 369–71; [1976] 1993, 17–20.
93. See also Stross 1998; Vogt 1998.
94. See Evans-Pritchard [1937] 1976, 151, 249; Vogt 1969, 369.
95. Vogt [1976] 1993, 20; also 1969, 370, 577.
96. Redfield and Villa Rojas [1934] 1962, 188–90, 374.
97. See Houston, Stuart, and Taube 2006, 67.
98. See also Monaghan 1998b, 143.
99. See Corona-Núñez 1957, 12; Klein 1975; Laughlin 1969, 175; Ortiz 1975, 182–84; Parsons 1966, 491; Ridington and Ridington 1975, 193; Soustelle 1940, 58.
100. Pfeiffer 1974, 126–27.
101. Klein 1975, 71.
102. Milbrath 1988, 61–62.
103. See Seler 1963, 2:31.
104. Klein 1975, 80.
105. Anders, Jansen, and Pérez-Jiménez 1994, 149–84; Taube 1993, 14, 32.
106. See Quilter 2005, 40, 44; Von Hagen and Morris 1998, 67, 71, fig. 48.
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108. See Kolata 1993; Mann 2005, 252; Manzanilla and Woodard 1990; Von Hagen and Morris 1998, 120–21.
109. Wilbert 1975, 165.
110. See Urton 1990, 97–104.
111. Wallace 1966, 171.
112. See Urton 1990, 107.
113. Urton 1981, 129–50; 1990, 107.
114. See Bricker 1989, 248–49.
115. See Pohl 1994.
116. Kearney 1972, 46–58.
117. McAnany 1995, 1.
118. See Durkheim [1912] 1965, [1895] 1982.
119. See Berger 1990, 25–26.
120. McGee 1985, 286.
121. See Garwood et al. 1991, vii.

122. Houston and Stuart 1996, 295.
123. See Ingold 2000, 90–92.
124. See J. Furst 1995, 181–82.
125. Scholes and Roys 1938, 610.
126. Morrison 1992; 2002, 6.
127. See Gill 1982, 11; Monaghan 1998.
128. Schaefer and Furst 1996, 12.
129. See Holland 1964, 303–4.
130. Astor-Aguilera 2009; Schaefer and Furst 1996, 24.
131. Knab 2004, 109.
132. Astor-Aguilera 2004; Sosa 1988.
133. Schaefer and Furst 1996, 12.
134. See Crumrine 1964, 8–12.
135. See also Astor-Aguilera 2004, 145–51; Sosa 1988.
136. See Gossen and Leventhal 1993, 197; Marcos 1995, 8.
137. Freidel, Schele, and Parker 1993, 178.
138. See Sullivan 1989.
139. Schaefer and Furst 1996, 25.
140. Tedlock 1982.
141. See Vogt 1976, 62.
142. Vogt 1969, 371; also [1976] 1993, 19.
143. See Freidel, Schele, and Parker 1993, 201–2; Houston and Stuart 1996, 292.
144. Freidel, Schele, and Parker 1993, 202.
145. See also Astor-Aguilera 2004, 191–94; Gann 1918, 4; Konrad 1991, 133.
146. McAnany 1995.
147. Suárez Cruz 1985, 31–35.
148. Suárez Cruz, personal communication to the author, 2006.
149. See Carmack 1981, 161; Freidel, Schele, and Parker 1993, 189, fig. 4.4a; Masson 2000, 202–3; Lorenzen 2003; Proskouriakoff 1962b, figs. 6a, 6b.
150. See Houston 1996; Schele 1974, 1976.
151. See Bunzel 1952, 269–70.
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154. See Broda 1987, 106; 1991, 111.
155. See Hallowell [1960] 1976, 367.
156. See Schaafsma 1999; Thompson 1879, 321.
157. See Ortiz 1969, 17–18; Schaafsma 1999, 189; Stephen 1936, 119.
158. Perrin 1996, 404.
159. See Preuss [1907] 1996, 109.
160. Schaefer 1996, 335.
161. Perrin 1996, 404.
162. Perrin 1996, 404.
163. Gell 1998, 224–26.
164. McGee 1990, 49, 51, 57, fig. 5.3.
165. See Perrin 1996, 409.
166. Perrin 1996, 425.
167. Heyden 1991, 192, 200.

168. Hallowell 1976, 361, 381.
169. Redfield and Villa Rojas [1934] 1962, 119, 209.
170. See Taube 2001.
171. López Austin 1980.
172. Meskell and Joyce 2003, 138, 142.
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175. See Hallowell [1955] 1967, 172–82; Morrison 2002, 26–28.
176. Carlsen and Prechtel 1991, 26.
177. Astor-Aguilera 2004, 253; Matos Moctezuma 1987, 12; Paz 1985, 54–55, 59–60.
178. See Guiteras Holmes 1965, 124–26; McGee 1990, 106; Vogt [1976] 1993, 22.
179. Perrin 1996, 426.
180. See Smith 2005.
181. See, in part, Broda 1982, 81; 1987, 108n1.
182. Paxton 2001, xi.
183. Bernal-García 1993.
184. See Sharer 1989, 169–70, fig. 11.3.
185. Thompson 1950, 71.
186. Roys 1967, 64, 100.
187. Headrick 2004, 372.
188. See Spinden 1975, 49, 126.
189. See Sosa 1986, 195–96.
190. See Tate 1992, 60, fig. 22c, 174–76, figs. 65–67.
191. Tate 1992, 60, fig. 22c.
192. See Tate 1992, 94–95, 152.
193. See Mathews and Pendergast 1979.
194. See Seler [1915] 1977, 59, figs. 104–13.
195. Greene Robertson 1974.
196. Schele 1976; Tate 1992, 74.
197. J. Furst 1995, 173–84.
198. Houston, Stuart, and Taube 2006, 98, 179.
199. Monaghan 1998(b), 140–41.
200. Similar to Leenhardt 1979, 153.
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203. Schaefer and Furst 1996, 12–13.
204. Lumholtz 1900, xx.
205. See Guthrie 2000; Hultkrantz 1979, 1982, 1983; Lohmann 2003; Saler 1977; Sered 2003.
206. Anonymous author in *The Olmec World: Ritual and Rulership* 1995, 163.
207. Houston, Stuart, and Taube 2006, 76.
208. Sahagún [1578–80] 1950–69, book 6, 252; also in Beekman 2003, 314.
209. See also Knab 2004.
210. See also J. Furst 1977.
211. Konrad 1991, 132.
212. Pohl 1981.
213. See Jorgensen 1986, 179–83; Kehoe 1992, 316–18; Lowie 1915; Voget 1984, 62, 93.

214. See Jorgensen 1986, 179, 182; especially Voget 1984, 217–18n5, 224, 301.
215. See Jorgensen 1986, 189; especially Voget 1984, 219–20.
216. Jordan 1993, 33.
217. See also Freidel, Schele, and Parker 1993, 128.
218. See Freidel, Schele, and Parker 1993, 105–6, 425; Miller 1974, 181; 1982; Taube 1994, 659.
219. See Taube 1994, 654.
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223. Roys 1939, 21.
224. See also Gómez-Pompa, Salvador Flores, and Aliphat Fernández 1990.
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GLOSSARY

Baalche'—A low alcohol, meadlike ritual drink made from stingless bee honey and bark from the baalche' tree

Chaako'ob—Maya rain patrons

Chan Oratorio—Small oratory hut

Chik'iin—West

Chuumuk K'iin—Midday

Chuumuk Aak'ab—Midnight

Iik'o'ob—Winds

Janal Pixano'ob—The dead eat

J'meen—Yucatán Maya ritual specialist

Kan—Four

Kaan—Serpent

Ka'an—Sky

K'an—Yellow

K'aan—Rope

K'atun—Twenty-year interval endings

K'atab—Cross shaped or cross angled

Kiimij—Death or to die

Kiimilil—Mortality

K'iin—Sun or day

Kool—Cornfield

Kruz Tun—Lord Stone

Kuch—Burden

K'uxan—Alive

K'uxan Suum—Living cord

Lak'iin—East

Noojol—Southward or down

Pib—Earth oven

Piix—Bundle

Pixano'ob—Soul-like persons

Sak B'eh—Raised, white causeway

Saastun—Quartz peering glass

Sujuy Ja'—Clean, pure water
Sujuy Sak Nook'—New white cloth
X'taabay—Female human-snake composite
Xunan Kaab—Native Maya stingless bees kept for medicinal and ritual-honey purposes
Xaman—Northward or up
Yaax che'—Green tree (the ceiba)
Yuumil K'aaxo'ob—Forest lords

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"The sweet, acrid copal smoke began to subside, and the hours-long offering was now at an end. It was now time for us to eat the offering of food and drink. As the bowls of food were handed out I stared blankly at the porridge before me. I was contemplating what I had just witnessed seconds before. . . . The native Maya priest who had just conducted the offering had taken the dressed green cross on his makeshift forest altar and simply tossed it aside. This Maya ritual expert, generally called a *j'meen*, one who does ritual, had done this as he began to prepare his departure. His work was complete, he was exhausted, and now it was time to take his leave. I was quite perplexed at what had just transpired. I continued to fixate on his apparent carelessness with the green cross. The j'meen had simply tossed the cross aside as if it were any ordinary object—as if the cross were not sacred to him. Yes, he was somewhat inebriated from his ritual drinking of alcohol. Yes, he was exhausted from the hours-long production performance over which he had just presided. Yet, his behavior seemed incomprehensible and highly sacrilegious to me.

"How could this religious expert I was considering a holy man treat that sacred object with such apparent irreverence? Was he a novice who perhaps did not know his sacred and religious office very well? Not possible, as those present at the ritual held him in high esteem and respected his deep knowledge. . . . While, as will be explained later, I do not consider my Maya consultants to be very Roman Catholic–Christian, I still could not easily come to terms with the apparent thoughtlessness of the j'meen toward the cross: a problem that I would later find to be all mine and not his."

—PREFACE, *The Maya World of Communicating Objects*

"Astor-Aguilera's hard-won understanding of his Maya mentors' world is a strong contribution to Maya studies and to comparative religions . . . the ethnography itself is fascinating."

—ALICE KEHOE, University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee

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